

Questions and Answers

Council

Thursday, 3rd December, 2020

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

Item (a)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“What consideration was made for the obstruction downstream (Tesco culvert) which has far lower capacity when allowing surface water run off into the Thames Water sewer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thank you and good evening Mr Gotelee, I hope you are well. And thank you for your question.

I believe you are referring to the surface water run-off from the A339/LRIE junction. Drainage attenuation was constructed as part of this project, which restricts the surface water run-off rate to those that were in existence pre-construction. I can therefore confirm full consideration was given to the capacity of the sewer, the downstream watercourse and the Tesco’s culvert.”

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?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do really, it was known at the time that the Tesco culvert is about half the flow of the Thames Water sewer. So is this a case of negligence because two in one just don’t go? We are getting flooded.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“No it isn’t. I would reiterate that the flow from the new areas of hard construction are fully attenuated and I’d be happy to ask officers to answer more technical questions, if you would like to put them in writing. “

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

Item (c)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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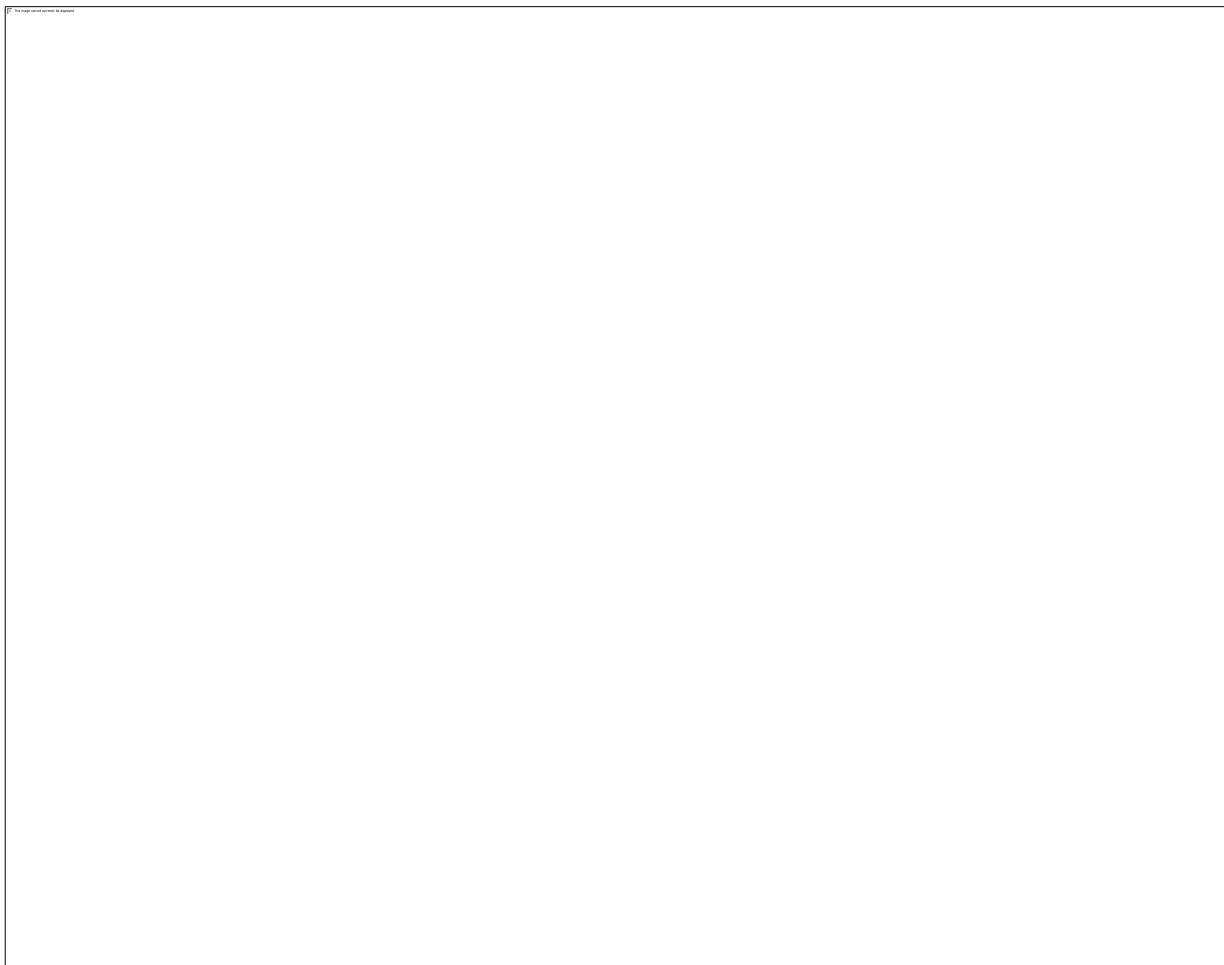
(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paula Saunderson:

“How much funding, and under which schemes, has WBC received from Central Government to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thank you Chairman and welcome Mrs Saunderson. Thank you for your question. This is a comprehensive answer. To date, the Council has received £91 million of funding to respond to the pandemic.

This figure can be broken down as follows – overall there have been 29 different funding streams, although some of these overlap and I have grouped them together as part of this response. I have also rounded these to the nearest £1,000



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

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?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“I did ask if it could be presented in tabular form as this would have saved a bit of time. Are you willing to publish this information in the COVID newsletter?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“I see no reason why we can't do that, although I stand to be corrected as that is not my newsletter. What I would say Mrs Saunderson is that we will publish this information and we do publish this information as part of our quarterly revenue budgetary report, which goes to Executive and is released to the public. So we are certainly happy to publish the information.”



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

Item (g)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:

“Regarding the Swale situated on land west of Tesco, London Road, Newbury, and flash flooding in the area, please would it be possible to give a brief explanation for what purpose was the Swale constructed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

“Mr Pearce, thank you for your question.

As far as I am aware this is a piece of privately owned open land, I am not aware that it is formally designated as a swale, or has any drainage feature for that matter. As for its purpose, maintenance and the reason for any work carried out on it over the past years, I am regrettably unable to provide a further answer. I can only suggest, respectfully, that you contact the landowner for further details on that.”

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

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“No thank you for your answer. I have no further question thank you.”

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

Item (i)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paul Morgan:

“Can you please provide a full breakdown of what additional spend (actual, committed and proposed) has been made on the LRIE project on top of the £946,000 reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission as the total cost of the project and litigation?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thank you again Mr. Chairman and good evening Mr. Morgan. This is the question I should have answered at Executive last time as I misunderstood it, so hopefully second time lucky. It is another full breakdown of additional spend, so again a comprehensive answer for you.

Additional spend on top of the previously advised figures are included here:

- Avison Young Development Brief: £85,652 (known)
- Avison Young input into consultation post publication of draft Development Brief inc: public engagement sessions, review of public feedback via Council webpage & consultation with LRIE tenants and LRIE leaseholders: (£9,900 (known)
- SSL options appraisal: £15,975 (known)
- Stuart Michael Flood Risk Assessment: £1,750 (known)
- Demolition of clubhouse, porta-cabins & concrete slabs: £70,000 (estimated)
- Works to create temporary recreational sport area: £121,000 (estimated)
- Subsidised pitch hire for NFC: £1,000 (known)
- Cost of metal sheet security on clubhouse: until structures are removed) £9,273 (known & on-going)
- Replacement football ground: To date proposals are cost neutral.
- Future consultancy work on London Road Industrial Estate: Extent and cost yet to be formally agreed. So the total of those figures I have given you is £315,000.”

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?”*

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

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do, thanks for that comprehensive breakdown Cllr. Mackinnon. My concern is that with a project of this nature, of this complexity and this size that is very important to keep one hundred percent track of everything that is being spent on the London Road Industrial Estate, otherwise you cannot ascertain whether it's financially viable or not and I've done a quick calculation and there are other area that you probably haven't covered. I don't agree that the football ground will be cost neutral. I can't see how that will be the case but looking at my calculation and I reckon you're going to be looking at about two and a half or three million pounds before you get anywhere further on this. Therefore, my question is: What assurance can you provide me and the rest of everyone listening that you will keep one hundred percent track of all the costs, every single cost associated with this project so that we can ascertain the financial viability of the project?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thanks Chairman and thanks Mr. Morgan. I have every faith in the project boards and the officers concerned at their ability and capability of tracking the costs accurately. “

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

Item (I)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Lee McDougall:

“Can the Council explain why it won't re-open Faraday Road Football Ground for organised youth football, even on a temporary basis, given it would cost no more than the current scheme for the recreational space?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thank you Chairman and good evening Mr. McDougall, I hope you are well. To reopen the old ground, on a temporary basis, for dedicated football use by a number of groups is not possible for two reasons: firstly, the Council wishes to make the area available for all recreational users and where dedicated use by different football groups will cause the area to be overused, the grass area degraded and to the general disadvantage of all users including football. This reflects the advice the Council has received from Sport England. The grass area will be lightly maintained by the Council but not as a dedicated sports pitch.”

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?”*

Lee McDougall asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes if I could, please? So, the question is what evidence of need do you have for the use you are going to give it. We've just not seen any evidence of need for the use that are going to put for the recreational space. So could you advise on what evidence of need you have?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“I can advise that the grounds are made available for all sorts of different groups and I don't have a specific piece of evidence to give you right now, but I'm very confident that the public in the Newbury area will be able to use the ground for recreational facilities where one didn't exist before.”

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

Item (m)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Vaughan Miller:

“Will the council work collaboratively with the Newbury football community to explore all options to make the current ground available for next 3 years for youth and ladies organised football?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thanks Chairman and thanks Mr. Miller looking at this question, it is not possible for the old ground to be given over for dedicated football use in the period between now and when development may take place. The reasons are the same as those set out in the answer to question (l).”

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?”*

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do, and to be honest, I find it frankly astonishing the answer given, it is a football ground and it is meant to be used for that purpose. So given that it has been over two and half years since it has been closed prematurely as we all know and at least another three years before any possible development might start. I will ask again, why, will the council, not consider exploring options for the community it represents, to reopen the ground for football? After all, it is a football ground with a status as an asset of community value.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thanks, thanks Mr. Chairman and thanks Mr. Miller. The Council is working very hard to re-provision football facilities for the West Berkshire public that has been made clear on several occasions. As to you re-asking your first question, I am afraid the same answer will be given.”

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

Item (p)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(p) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Maria Morgan:

“Would the Council agree that the current flats that can now be seen rising from the ground at the old Sterling Cables site and at the old bus station would be more appropriate and in keeping with somewhere like Basingstoke than the historic market town of Newbury?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

“Thank you Chairman, Thank you for your question Mrs Morgan. Your question concerning architectural merits of new development over the preservation of existing built development.

Design is always subjective and one person’s ideal is another’s carbuncle. In other words, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The Council cannot agree that this development would be more in keeping with Basingstoke than Newbury otherwise it would not have granted planning permission. Furthermore, both of the developments quoted are bringing much needed life back into the centre of 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?”*

Maria Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“I do, yes. I would just like to say in the context of the pandemic over the past eight months. I think we have learned locally and nationally that families living in flats, particularly high rise flats, have suffered more than any others. Especially when those flats have little or no outdoor space. So I’d like to ask the councillors, if they will, in the future, when planned developments are coming in for approval, if they will take into account the mental and physical health needs of our community, in terms of creating areas of outdoor space and also retaining leisure and sporting facilities.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

“Thank you. Our planners always take into account amenity space when looking at planning applications and we have standards for amenity space for all developments”.

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

Item (q)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Stewart:

“Please can the Council provide a full breakdown since 2014 on what it has spent, and what it is still committed to spend, with St Modwen Developments Ltd?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“Thank you Chairman and good evening Mr. Stewart. There are no outstanding liabilities with St. Modwen. The costs of £175,212 are in the public domain and were specifically allowed for within the Development Agreement and where St. Modwen were entitled to reclaim these costs should the Council be unable to enact the contract, as turned out to be the case. These costs were enshrined in the contract under two separate clauses: 12.6 (a) at £45,000 and 23 of Schedule 2 at £130,212. These costs covered legal fees for drawing up the Development Agreement, legal fees associated with potential CPO action, fees in respect of potential site delivery for Bayer, presentation at Newbury Vision Conference and general project management services.”

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?”*

John Stewart asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes, I didn't quite hear the figure you mentioned Mr. Mackinnon - was that £175,962? (Cllr. Mackinnon corrected with £175,212). I had a look at your list of spending over £500 and there is a value of £175,962 from the 18th of April 2019 payment to St Modwen classed as an unclassified chief executive supplies and service. It is just different to your figure by about £700 but I don't know if that is something that you would like to explain or write back on?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“I don't have the full breakdown in front of me, £750 out – we can surely look into that for you. “

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

Item (h)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by John Gotelee:

“Will the council commit to testing the quality of the water at the outfall of the Thames water sewer to establish why the wildlife seems to have died off?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

“Thank you Chairman and thank you Mr Gotelee.

Thank you for your question. We currently have no plans to carry out water quality testing of this watercourse. I am sure you are aware that the Northcroft Stream takes surface run-off from approximately 70 hectares of Newbury Town Centre. I am not aware of any recent significant changes that would result in an increase in pollution.

I will however arrange for an officer to visit who is familiar with that watercourse make a visit and to see if there are any obvious signs of pollution.”

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?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do. A lot of the pollution that we have seen even recently is oil floating on the surface, now it is very likely that the Council is actually the landlord of the polluters on the industrial estate so what’s your policy on taking action against your own tenants if it is proved they are polluting.”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

“Thank you Mr. Gotelee. I would suggest that if there’s action to be taken, it shouldn’t actually matter who is creating the issue. I believe that we would treat all cases in a like fashion. Hopefully we won’t be causing our own problems, but we certainly will be able to look into that. As, I said we will identify where the issue lies.”

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

Item (k)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:

“Regarding the London Road, Newbury, Catchment Study, Project No. 195110, produced by ARDENT Consulting Engineers. Please would it be possible to confirm the total cost paid to Ardent together with the main reasons for commissioning the study?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

“Thank you Chairman and good evening again Mr Pearce,

Thank you for your question. The catchment study cost £6,250 and was commissioned as a direct result of concerns expressed by a number of residents on London Road about flooding of gardens and the increased risk of property flooding. Sadly, this is just one of the detrimental impacts of Climate Change that we are seeing more of this across the Country.

One of our duties as Lead Local Flood Authority is to investigate possible sources of flood risk from surface water and ordinary watercourses and, where feasible and practical, to bid for Central Government funding to introduce flood alleviation measures. As a Council we have been very successful at bringing in this funding (places like Newbury, Thatcham, Winterbourne, Purley and Pangbourne to name a few have benefitted significantly from such measures).

I am pleased to let you know that as a direct result of the London Road Catchment Study the Environment Agency has provisionally allocated a further £45,000 in the 2021/22 financial year towards detailed investigation and design of flood mitigation measures for the properties on London Road. This funding is currently indicative and we will only receive full confirmation from the Environment Agency in January. However, if it is approved we will be in a position to design and bid for further funding for infrastructure measures to mitigate the flood risk to London Road properties.”

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?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes, thank you for the answer. Can you just tell me have we supplied the Environment Agency with all the information they need, all the documentation. Are we just waiting now for the funding? “

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

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

“I can't imagine we haven't provided all that information Mr. Pearce, so I can only assume we have. (Mr. Pearce asked if Cllr Mackinnon could find out for him and just confirm.) I'm sure they, have done, given they have provisionally allocated funding, but I will get that super confirmation for you. “

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

Item (n)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(n) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:**

“Could the council provide details of how it expects its proposed Recreational Sports Pitch in Faraday Road to work?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered:

“Thank you Mr Miller. It will be available in the same way as any other public recreational open space – free access to all users who will be expected to use common sense and courtesy to other users as appropriate. If scratch teams of any description wish to use the area for informal sport, they will be free to do so, on the basis of first come first serve.”

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?”*

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Did the Council consult with any of the obvious stakeholders like the representatives of the local football community, other sports organisations or even the town council before deciding this was the best way to invest £191k of its taxpayer money?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered:

“The view Mr. Miller was that the location was crucial to the economic development proposals for the centre of Newbury and this was the best use of the land that we could see.”

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

Item (o)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(o) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Can the council provide a list of which sports organisations in or around Newbury it expects to book the proposed Recreational Sports Pitch?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered:

“Thank you again for your question Mr. Miller. The answer is no. The area as open public space will be available for any recreational use whether informal five-a-side, rounders or any other physical activity that promotes health & well-being.”

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?”*

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes. We are in the Full Council meeting and I’d like to remind every single one of the Conservative councillors here that all of you back every single proposal coming from Councillors Mackinnon and Woollaston and their predecessors over the last four and a half years. You have opportunity since you were elected in 2019 to reject everyone. Are all of your councillors happy that it will be leaving Newbury football communities’ kids, ladies and men’s teams short of one quality pitch for the next few years and at least five to six years in total? Are you happy with that?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered:

“I would not be happy with that, but that is not the case. There is a firm football strategy in place which will ensure there is ample supply as needed.”

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

Item (b)

Council Meeting on 3/12/2020

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Dr Susan Millington:

“Will West Berkshire Council agree to set a tree planting target to double the amount of tree cover in the district by 2045, in line with the step recently taken by Oxfordshire County Council?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside provided the following written response:

“Protecting existing woodlands in Berkshire and planting trees and new woodlands are certainly good things to do. However, current scientific advice warns us not to place too much faith in trees to sequester carbon. Trees will definitely help us slow climate change, but they won't reverse it on their own. Planting trees in the wrong locations can also be environmentally damaging and counterproductive in its own right.

The Council is, through our Environment Strategy, committed to planting more trees. However I would not want to commit to an arbitrary amount of coverage by a date that is seemingly unrelated to any of our targets. I would first like to ensure that we are introducing targets that are relevant to West Berkshire. I will therefore propose this is discussed at the next meeting of the Environment Advisory Group.”

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

Item (f)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Ros Clow:

“Has the Council considered setting up a 'Working from Home Hub' in the town centre?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture provided the following written response:

“As part of our Economic Development Strategy we are considering how to attract investment for either WBC or private sector provision of flexible office space of the type you suggest. We have met with some providers although aren't in a position to proceed at this time. Any decision to do so must be based on a sound business case which is something the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company has agreed to develop on our behalf. This will be informed not only by an analysis of local demand but also insight into existing supply. Some of this work has been done already by Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership who produced a report on the availability of incubator space in the region, although we appreciate that some of this will need to be reviewed in light of the current situation.”

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

Item (j)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Stuart Gourley:

“Will this Council abide by the ‘development principle’ in the Avison Young LRIE Master Plan and provide ‘an alternative and suitable replacement football ground’ prior to the ‘disposal and potential redevelopment’ of the site it currently occupies?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development provided the following written response:

“Appropriate Sport England approved facilities will be in place for club level football before any redevelopment commences on the former football ground.”



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

Item (r)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(r) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Jason Braidwood:

“From a health and well-being perspective how can the Council possibly justify the closure of the area’s best football ground at Faraday Road when the Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) clearly states “current supply and demand analysis for secured and accessible pitch provision shows there is a large deficit across West Berkshire”?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health & Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture provided the following written response:

“The reference to a deficit in the PPS is based on the number of existing pitches without guaranteed security of tenure and not the number currently available. Whilst the Council works with Sport England and Newbury Football Club to secure a new home for sustainable club football, other football groups are able we understand to carry on using existing facilities.”

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

Item (d)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paula Saunderson:

“How has each Central Government fund, received in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, been distributed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The first two funds; the non ring-fenced funds and the income compensation scheme have been distributed across Council departments where there has been increased costs, for example in Adult Social Care, re-opening Council services etc, or where income has been lost, for example in respect of car parking.

The other schemes have their own grant terms and conditions with varying amount of flexibilities, with some funding expected to last into the next financial year. As an example, the business grants schemes have had a mandatory element to them stipulating how the funds should be distributed and to which businesses, but also have a discretionary element too, that the Council has used to provide a more tailored response.

We anticipate to distribute all funding received by us through the various schemes, with the exception being on £163k of the infection control fund and £500k of business grants where Government made an estimation of the total business grant to be distributed and we spent 94% of our allocation (versus 90% nationally) to 100% of those eligible businesses. We also spent just over 96% of our discretionary scheme and we were the 6th Council in the country to commence distribution of this funding to support businesses in the local area.

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

Item (e)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paula Saunderson:

“How many recipients have benefitted from the different funding schemes established as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The schemes are very wide ranging, so they cannot be broken down to individual recipients, for example, the general funding and income compensation schemes are applied Council wide; some of the other schemes are applied district wide e.g. the Contain Outbreak Management Fund is for the whole of the district to support containing Covid-19.

On some of the more specific schemes though, we have awarded:

- 2,766 Businesses grants to businesses
- 3022 accounts/claims have received a reduction to their Council Tax bills
- 58 people have received a £500 self-isolation payment
- 62 people have received an emergency hardship payment
- 43 Care Homes and 44 Community providers have received infection control funding

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

Item (a)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Keith Woodhams:

“Can the Executive Member for Highways tell me how much tax payers hard earned cash has been spent replacing or repairing road signs, road name plates, lampposts and pedestrian central refuges hit by vehicles and endangering the lives of pedestrians, since the Conservatives took control of West Berkshire Council in 2015?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Councillor Woodhams I should thank you for your question although in truth, I do find it a little disappointing on a number of levels. Firstly there seems to be, conveniently one could suggest, no recognition of the operational need for maintenance requirements over the desire for a headline. Secondly there is no direct total correlation between damage to any of the items mentioned and endangered lives of pedestrians as you are well aware. And finally I can only surmise that during a Rip van Winkel phase you seem to have lost the years between the change of control of the Conservatives in 2005 to 2015 they are not one and the same.

However I will say this in the last five years Council Officers have issued several thousand works orders in relation to signs, lamp columns and other street furniture. These works orders cover new works, wear and tear, vandalism and some are due to damage from vehicles. Now the time needed to sift through these purchase orders to try to understand the exact historic reason for each request would be considerable. It would not be an effective use of Council Officer's time and in absolute respect for them I have not asked Officers to stop other essential work especially in these difficult and pressured times to trawl through historic records for detail. Whilst I fully expect that to be of disappointment to you I will clarify that road traffic collisions occur for a wide variety of reasons. For example a recent collision I believe in your ward that you were quite vocal about until it was established that the driver had sadly blacked out at the wheel. There was no evidence of driving without care nor of speeding. For the record I truly hope that the driver has made a full and healthy recovery. Unlike this event the majority of these incidents go unreported and we would receive no data or incident report from the Police.

Where we do receive Police reports I can assure you that Council Officers investigate and, where appropriate and practical, implement road safety intervention measures.

I would also add and I know this personally from witnessing and reporting an incident where a driver reversed at low speed into a lamppost rendering it unsafe that where we have any details of any offending motorists that damage Council property, I can assure you that any repair costs are recovered through insurance.

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

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 Woodhams asked the following supplementary question:

Does the Portfolio Holder for Highways agree with me that in the majority of cases road signage has probably been hit by vehicles because they have been travelling far too fast and lost control? Can the Executive Member for Highways therefore tell me what he is doing to cut the speed of these potentially dangerous drivers?

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I think there were two questions there Chairman, my answer to the first one would be no.



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

Item (b)	Council Meeting on 3/12/2020
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(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Tom Marino:

“What is the council planning to do to help our disadvantaged families and children during the coming winter?”

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

“West Berkshire Council has launched a COVID Winter Grant Scheme worth £279k for food, energy and other essential items for families with children and other vulnerable families or individuals in need due to the pandemic. Free School Meal vouchers for the school Christmas and half term holidays will also form part of the programme. The scheme will run from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Through the scheme, the Council will provide families, individuals and vulnerable people in need with financial support for food, utility bills, water bills for household purposes, or other related essentials.

As part of the scheme, the Council will make arrangements for the provision of Free School Meal vouchers for eligible children in early years' settings and 5 to 16 year olds during the Christmas and February half term school holidays (17 days in total). And children in school not currently receiving Free School Meals but considered by the school as vulnerable will be included. Consideration will also be given to children between 16 and 18 and those children in cross border education settings. Details on how the vouchers will be implemented are currently being finalized with schools.

As well as £279k we have had further funding of £150k has been identified from the Council's overall allocation of Covid-related grants to support the local delivery framework should it be required. We have also had a further £103k Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies for ongoing support with their needs. This will provide a total of £532k funding available to our most needy people in West Berkshire during the coming winter months and these difficult times. I am pleased to say that everyone can see that the Conservative led Government and the Conservative led authority of West Berkshire are supporting our most needy people.

Councillor Tom Marino stated that he did not have a supplementary question.

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

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