

Questions and Answers

Council

Thursday, 19th September, 2013

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Council Meeting

19 September 2013

Questions and Answers



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

There were no public questions submitted in relation to items not included on the agenda.

But

(a) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside by Mr Tony Hammond:

"The Statement of Consultation for the Sandleford Supplementary Plan contains a submission from Paul Goddard regarding additional access points to the development and includes the statement:

"An access onto the A343 Andover Road would reduce development traffic onto Monks Lane by 43% to 46% that would reduce traffic through the Andover Road / Monks Lane / Essex Street Mini Roundabouts and fronting Parkhouse School by some 300 vehicles for both peak travel periods."

Can the Council tell us where this traffic has gone?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

"Thank you for your question Mr Hammond

By providing an additional access onto the A343 Andover Road, the traffic that would have exited the site onto Monks Lane would instead access direct onto the A343 Andover Road. Traffic would do this if it was routing to and from the A34 to avoid Newbury town centre. This traffic would therefore no longer proceed via the Andover Road / Monks Lane / Essex Street Roundabouts, but would access direct onto the A343 to the south of this junction and Parkhouse School."

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

Mr Tony Hammond asked the following supplementary question:

"I understand a lot of this information comes from an additional traffic assessment that's been done, where the part I just quoted from is some kind of covering statement that's appeared in the appendix.

Now, I've been involved in the Sandleford debate for quite a while and seen plenty of documents, so I did make a request to Officers earlier this week whether that additional information could be made available and one of the things that came out of the consultation at the event at the Rugby Club a while ago was that this work had been done and would eventually appear when this report was done, so I said "Well I can't see it. Could you tell me where it is?" I got a baffling reply from the Officers which said that the report is not available to

the public because Members (I don't know which particular ones) had asked for it not to be published and made available.

So my question is: Can you confirm that this is indeed the case and explain the rationale behind this decision and how it enhances the open and inclusive consultation that's happened so far with the Sandleford debate if we can't actually see this additional information?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

"Thank you

That's a very complex question. In my presentation with regard to item 15 on the agenda some of your question will be answered, but the short answer is that we cannot release any information generally because we're still considering options and no decisions have been taken. People will be informed as and when appropriate."

(b) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside by Mr Peter Norman:

"Does the Council now accept that it is unrealistic to reduce the number of car journeys arising from the Sandleford development to a level that would allow the site to function with only two all vehicular access points to Monks Lane?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

"Thank you Mr Norman for your question

The site has been assessed through the Core Strategy Examination as deliverable with two all vehicle accesses onto Monks Lane and an additional sustainable transport link from Warren Road onto the Andover Road. This is still the case, however, additional accesses are indeed being considered to maximise the opportunities for permeability through the site. This is as a result of responses from public consultation and a more detailed consideration of transportation was always going to occur prior to any formal planning application being submitted.

The Council is still very committed via a Travel Plan that will accompany any planning application, to encouraging travel by other modes to the car as much as possible. It is still and always has been recognised that as with all developments, a majority of travel to and from the site will be by car."

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 Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

"I wonder how that squares with the information Paul Goddard gave me on the consultation process where he states that the Highway Authority has stated that they regard at least three all vehicular access points on the site as essential and 4 as desirable. Given the fact that Council still believes that 2 access points will make the site deliverable, and given the overwhelming

opposition following the consultation to opening up Warren Road to further vehicle access, I'm just wondering why this is still on the agenda and under consideration?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

"I can only give you the same answer that I've just given to Mr Hammond because your questions are not dissimilar. I'm going to be covering that in some aspects in my introduction to item 15 and I can only reiterate what I said to Mr Hammond that we are considering options."

(c) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside by Mr Peter Norman:

"The early ecological reports from the promoters of Sandleford laid great emphasis on the fact that years of neglect had reduced the bio-diversity of the area. Can the Council confirm that as part of the SPD there will be a commitment in establishing a Parkland to restore the bio diversity of what will be left of Sandleford, through the restoration of hedgerows where these have fallen into disrepair, clearance of ponds and other such measures - i.e. that there will be proactive management rather than just maintaining the status quo?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

"The SPD requires that a planning application will be supported by a Strategic Landscape and Green Infrastructure Plan. This will draw upon the following documents which will also need to be supplied:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Strategic Ecological Enhancement Plan
- Historic Conservation Plan/Heritage Impact assessment
- And Public Open Space Strategy

In addition, prior to the first house being built, a Country Parkland Design and Management Plan will need to be agreed with the Council and this will draw on the documents that I've just mentioned.

The overall aim therefore is to enhance the biodiversity of the Country Parkland and the actions included in this document are likely to include the items mentioned in the question amongst other measures."

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 Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

"Can you assure us that prior to planning applications, conditional planning application, that further ecological work will be done to ascertain what is on Sandleford and what needs to be preserved and that this will be independent of the developer?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside answered:

“I think that I’ve already emphasised that these assessments will be carried out. An enormous amount of work has already been done and we are quite clear about the importance of the site. There is some very ancient woodland there and it is a very important site to us and will form part of the link from Sandleford across Greenham down to the Thatcham Reedbeds, so it’s a very important site to us and you have my personal assurance because countryside is also one of my portfolio responsibilities, that we will take every measure that we possibly can to protect and enhance the site.”

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

(a) Question submitted to the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

“Could the Chair of Governance and Audit Committee explain why his Committee decided not to reduce the number of signatures required on a petition to this Council to trigger a debate - from 5,000 (3% of the population of West Berkshire) to 1,500 (1% of the population of West Berkshire), in line with the other Berkshire Unitary authorities? The Government only require 100,000 signatures on a petition (0.15% of the UK population) to be considered for a debate in the House of Commons!”

The Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee answered:

“Councillor Brooks

During the Governance and Audit Committee meeting held on 2 September little or no compelling evidence was set forward to justify why the current petition threshold should be changed. On that basis the Committee could not support 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?”*

Councillor Jeff Brooks asked the following supplementary question:

“I’d be grateful, as Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee, should you continue in that role, you give us some idea of what evidence would have been compelling to you other than the fact that we’ve presented tonight that it has become absolute custom and practice across the County outside of West Berkshire. What would be compelling Sir?”

The Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee answered:

“I think in the earlier debate which we had on a previous agenda item, Councillor Lundie indicated to you some possible avenues to actually take this matter forward. I would suggest to you that you give some consideration to this with your Group and bring this matter back to Council at a future time.”

(b) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Finance, Economic Development, Health and Safety, HR Pensions and Property by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

“Will the portfolio holder provide assurances that it is not this Council's practice, nor will be during the life of this Administration, to pursue any claim or debt owed to the Council by an individual, by contacting them while they are in hospital?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

“I would like to thank Councillor Brooks for his question which I will be responding to.

The article in today's Newbury Weekly News alleges that West Berkshire Council staff harassed a dying man in hospital. Simply put I would like to reassure Members and residents that this did not happen, nor would it ever happen. As we've stated before we shall not discuss publicly the private affairs of any resident. I shall also be writing to the Newbury Weekly News to make this clear. Given that sadly, I have to confess, the Newbury Weekly News do not publish all of my letters, I'd like to read the letter that I intend to send out to Council just so that they understand what kind of communications is going back and forth:

"Dear Sir, I refer to your article last week claiming the Council pursued payment for Council Tax from a Mr Smith whilst he was in hospital. The Council can categorically say that they have never pursued anyone in hospital regarding any matter, nor would it. Regarding the claims in the article, the Council will simply say that they are untrue.

What the Council will not do is discuss personal details of individuals publicly believing that its first duty is to the residents of the District, not to the Press.

The question the Council would put to your readers is: Would they want their personal or financial details to be revealed by the Council to the Press? We believe not. For that reason the Council has been resolved in its stance that, in order to respect the confidentiality of those involved, it will not discuss claims regarding personal details of individuals in public."

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?"*

There was no supplementary question asked.

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