

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday, 8th May, 2014

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Executive Meeting

8 May 2014

Questions and Answers



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

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

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

- (a) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision by Councillor David Rendel:**

"How many of the proposals for additional "Grasscrete" (or equivalent) parking areas which were turned down for Members' Bids funding two years ago have now been implemented, and how many have not?"

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision answered:

In 2012 there were four Members' bids submitted for the use of Grasscrete, one from yourself, one from Councillor Longton, one from Councillor Edwards and one from Councillor Billy Drummond, but none of those schemes were approved as you know from Members' bids and none have since been implemented.

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 Rendel asked the following supplementary question:

"Would the Portfolio Holder agree that due to the weather at the beginning of this year a lot of these spaces have probably now got into a much worse state, and in fact the Council has wasted a lot of money because if it had done the job at the time they were asked for we wouldn't now be having to pay for a lot more repairs than could have been necessary at the time".

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision answered:

You're talking about the grass verge, the footpaths/footways and indeed in two areas, not any of the ones that are listed, we have piloted the use of some plastic Grasscrete and if that proves successful then we hope to do more of that as funds become available.

(b) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Keith Woodhams:

“Following the comment made by the trading standards officer at the District / Parish Conference, that he would be investigating shoddy workmanship, when will the Leader of Council instruct the trading standards department to investigate the shoddy workmanship of the highways contractors who are responsible for repairing roads in the district?”

The Leader of Council answered:

We’ve had the wettest winter on record. This inevitably and unsurprisingly will cause potholes and road damage. In particular your question relates to the repairing of the roads and the work of the highways contractor. However, I don’t really support the premise of the question but I thought I’d give our highways contractor the opportunity to make their views known, so I did contact Volker, who are our largest provider of repairs on the highways, and Andy Spencer, the Contract Manager, came back and he was quite clear:

“Volker Highways undertake carriage maintenance repairs under instruction from West Berkshire Council through the current Highways Term Maintenance Contract. They range from two hour responses to emergency potholes to making safe highway defects, 24 hour response to pothole repairs followed up with a permanent repair within 28 days, so it’s a comprehensive programme.

Since April 2013, almost 16,000 square metres of permanent pothole repairs have been undertaken. An average of 60 two hour response pothole plugging repairs are carried out each month and around 50 24 hour response temporary pothole repairs are carried out each month.

The pothole repairs are carried out using a client specified proprietary material designed to effect a repair to prevent any safety issues such as damage to vehicles or potential injury to cyclists. By definition these repairs are designed to keep the carriageway safe in the short term until a permanent repair can be carried out.”

A lot of what you bring to the Council, to these meetings, is temporary repairs that you feel have been a little bit too temporary, so I think there’s not a full appreciation of that.

Volker’s were quite clear: “In summary my staff are competent, well trained and committed to providing a good job for West Berkshire Council and I would strongly refute the allegations of shoddy workmanship, that just isn’t borne out by the facts.”

So closing that off, after the wettest winter on record I’m not surprised that we do get potholes and we do need to do road repairs and in fact that’s why we’ve just announced the £3.2m repairs programme. Fortunately a large part of that has been funded by the Government, but I gave a very clear commitment right in the middle of the crisis that we would make good whatever is required, we’d use reserves and other resources to deliver that.

The last 27 times you’ve asked this question it’s been very much in the ‘squeaky wheel’ area of politics, so if you ask a question often enough as to why there is a pothole in the road that may suggest there’s something wrong with our policies, the implementation of our policies or the execution of our policies by our contractors. Now I refute all three of them. I would be delighted to hear your manifesto commitments, but given that the best you could come up with in budget was £300,000 against the £3.2m we’re spending, I’m not sure your plans are aspirationally high enough so, in summary, Volker are quite clear they don’t deliver shoddy workmanship for us, we’re quite clear that they’re delivering a good job for the Council. I dispute there’s anything shoddy in Volker’s delivery for this Council or anything wrong in our policy delivery.

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 Keith Woodhams asked the following supplementary question:

“Are you aware of two emails from local residents, firstly saying “Your Council contractors have thrown some tar in some of the holes, you really have to see it – a monkey could do a better job of the ones they’ve filled-in – what is going on?” and the second one is “The pothole I hit had been filled on the 1st and failed and damaged my car on the 7th. If only they spent a bit more doing the job properly, what they must have spent on defending the case with a barrister, solicitor, staff from the Council and two Council witnesses I dread to think”? So your view of the situation is not quite the same as residents see it.”

The Leader of Council answered:

I thank you for raising it this evening and I’ll go back to where I started this discussion. The facts do not bear out the case that you continually try to make that we do not do a good job of managing the roads. I do not debate that potholes happen. They do happen and we fill them. We will keep filling them every time they happen, but they do happen, and I think it’s disingenuous to suggest there’s some flaw in the operation of this Council because potholes happen.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision (response to be given by Councillor Dominic Boeck) by Councillor Adrian Edwards:

“I was very pleased that the Council had taken the initiative to install a recharging point for electric vehicles on the first floor of the Kennet Centre car park. Does the Council intend to install these in other car parks throughout the District?”

The Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener, Waste, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Thatcham Vision answered:

The electric vehicle charging point in question was installed using a grant from the Government Office for Low Emission Vehicles.

This grant was originally applied for by the Council’s Energy Management Team last year and includes the installation of a further two charging points in this financial year. The location of these points is still to be agreed and if any Councillor has a suggestion as to where they feel a charging point could be beneficial please speak to Adrian Slaughter in the Energy Management Team and we can consider it against the grant criteria.

The Energy Management Team is currently working with the Transport Policy Team to develop a strategy for future electric charging points and how they can best serve local residents and businesses. Our Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 states that the Council will provide points in car parks and will require them in major development proposals. The point in the Kennet Centre car park is a first step towards wider roll out.

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 Edwards asked the following supplementary question:

“I just wondered, once the strategy has been agreed, will the Council give prominent advertising to where these points will be and how much they’ll cost?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision answered:

Yes we will.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education by Councillor David Allen:

“Please provide an update to the Hungerford Education Plan.”

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

A full response to the Hungerford Education Plan consultation is now on the West Berkshire website. This gives the details of the responses, the next steps etc. However, I’ll just give you a short answer: We will not be continuing to explore the option to provide an all through school on the John O’Gaunt site, but we shall be carrying out the refurbishment work to the secondary school which was part of the plan to the value of approximately £1m. This will commence during the summer holidays and covers a list of items requested by the school.

With regards to the need for additional primary school accommodation, we shall be setting up a group called the ‘Hungerford Education Debate’ to further take this issue forward. We will have representatives from West Berkshire Council, from Hungerford schools and governors, the HEAR group and the Town Council. The dialogue will include considering future primary school demand and other issues which may affect Hungerford education at the time, but for more detail I would recommend that you look at the document on the website.

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 Allen asked the following supplementary question:

“At the initial Executive meeting where this was discussed, I did express some concern over the sequence of events as you weren’t asking the views of the Town Council and parents from Hungerford. Would you say in hindsight that you’d do things differently next time?”

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

I’m not quite sure whether you could put that horse before the cart. I think if we had a group for example, like the HEAR group, if that was already in place and we were proposing something different in Hungerford to do with education we would probably now maybe bring that group in on the initial discussions, but we discussed with the relevant education people in Hungerford before we came up with any sort of plan and that plan then went out to consultation, so I’m not sure that we could have done the consultation before we had the plan.

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