

Summary of the Facebook Live event – 16th February 2021

On the 16th February the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for finance and the Council's s151 Officer (Chief Finance Officer) hosted a Facebook Live event for members of the public to ask questions. There were also some questions received via social media or directly to the Communications team before the event. As at 17th February 2021 the session had been viewed 1.3k times on Facebook.

This paper is included in the pack for Full Council for members to consider as part of the overall budget setting pack.

A summary of the questions are included below and these were answered during the session:

- Where was money allocated for the Joint Venture with Sovereign and for exploring a Housing Company?
- Do you think people can really afford a Council Tax increase?
- What's the difference, and what is in, the capital strategy between the £40m, for the People directorate and £32m for Education schemes?
- What are the advantages of weekly food waste collection? Why is the current one not sufficient?
- Why don't you promote solar panels on new homes instead of on farmland? Will these panels be imported?
- Will the solar farm include a community investment opportunity & benefit fund? What about biodiversity & ecology around the panels?
- The budget includes a £100k cost saving from adult social care (P6 ASC) through "review of care packages" with the implication noted as "There is potential for complaints from service users and their families when care is removed."
Why are we looking to save money by removing care packages from the vulnerable when ASC budgets are being underspent due to so many care home residents dying of Covid?
- Replacing these bin boxes must be costing WBC a lot of money which is simple to solve by either holding Veolia to account for breakages or to simplify the recycling process by having one large recycling bin instead of all the stupid small ones we are given.
- Just allow everyone to use the green bins again! A separate food waste caddy will not survive long. We had a good system and it was changed - that is why so much ends in the black bins.

- Is there any plan to improve road safety around Sulhampstead and Ufton primary school... ie pavement safe crossing area?
- Might be a daft question but why can't food waste be put in with garden waste and composted down as it's all organic?
- Hi there. How does this Council Tax increase (1.9%) compare with other areas? Thanks!
- PWLB rates are so low that it feels now is the time to be much more ambitious on capital investment. Social housing and more solar parks both would bring revenue streams in for very low interest costs.

There were some further questions that were not picked up as part of the session, these were:

- Do you have any places to install an all weather/3G sports pitch facility for use of grass roots clubs in Tilehurst or Theale as we are badly lacking these on this side of Reading as it's your area?

Response: as part of the capital budget there is funding to support the development of a 3G pitch at Denefield School. The main club linked to the school will be Westwood Wanderers FC – currently they operate almost 30 teams across all age groups. There will be opportunities for other community agencies and clubs to hire the facilities around the main clubs bookings

- Is there any room in our budget to consider free parking weekends/days in town hoping for high street revival?

Response: We are currently undertaking some master-planning work on Newbury Town Centre with money set aside in the 2020-21 budget; this will look at a wide range of options for the town centre area as a whole and is due to report back in the Summer 2021.

- Where can I find information on how much CIL will be invested in Greenham? 7 new mini residential estates in 5 years huge demand for infrastructure improvement.

The link below is to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan – this supports the local plan and a new one is due to publication shortly

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/idp>