

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 3 May 2018

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Questions and Answers



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

Questions submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Ms Julie Knapman:

- (a) *“What criteria was used in the selection of the Warren Road Access within the Sandleford Development by West Berkshire Council?”*
- (b) *“What research did the Council undertake to confirm the suitability of the Warren Road Access from a legal and operationally optimal perspective prior to insisting its inclusion?”*
- (c) *“Bearing in mind the many valid objection points against the Warren Road Access by local residents, Highways Department and Newbury Town Council, presented during the recently proposed Sandleford planning applications, is it not time to review this criteria to determine whether it continues to be West Berkshire Council's preferred choice?”*

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

Thank you for your questions Ms Knapman. You are asking three questions but all three are inter-related, so I will give you a full answer to Question 1 but you are entitled to ask a supplementary question to all three of your questions. So if you have three supplementary questions I will be happy to answer those, but you will just get one answer to your questions because of the linkage between them. Are you happy with that?

Ms Julie Knapman: *Yes, thank you.*

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

The consideration of alternative access points was largely in response to the earlier consultation when there was significant opposition to having only two main accesses onto Monks Lane. The Council wishes to explore the potential for an all vehicle access through Warren Road and access onto the A339 to assess the comparative effects of traffic flows from the site onto the surrounding highway network. The bus link would remain as part of any such option.

Additional access points would also maximise the opportunities for permeability through the site. Any access will be designed with paramount regard to safety.

Any planning application would be accompanied by a full Transport Assessment and Travel Plan (Appendix 2 of the SPD [Supplementary Planning Document] refers to this) and this would assess the impact of the development on the local highway network as well as measures for encouraging the use of non-car modes of transport”.

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?”*

Ms Julie Knapman asked the following supplementary question:

“You use the phrase “wishes to explore”, we’re several years down the line now from exploring and I think it’s perhaps a time that we maybe look at what we’ve found and come up with either an alternative route or ways around the problems rather than coming up with a continual list of

reasons why we shouldn't have the Warren Road access. I think opportunities are being missed because we are not building Sandleford, because of the Warren Road access.

'Assess the impact on the local highway network', I intercepted some surveyors and I asked them "Are you including St George's car park in your measurements?" They were only looking at highways adopted roads. It has a massive impact. The hub of the community in that area, you are looking at so many different buildings and community groups and actually a lot of vulnerable people. It is essential that we look at this because so far this has been brushed under the carpet and we have the same thing coming up time and time again. We're not getting anywhere. Safety is not being considered properly and developers are coming out with the same things and you know my question is really 'do West Berkshire Council accept that by persisting with the Warren Road access and going against the original CS3 adopted by West Berkshire Council in 2012, they will be bringing traffic closer to mothers and children who with a differential of height between the road and the pavement will be subjected to exhaust fumes directly at face level?'

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

Thank you for your statement and your question Ms Knapman. The consideration of Warren Road as an alternative access has been closely looked at by our Highways Team and we are certain that access can be provided on Warren Road. Significant modelling has been done and if our Highways Team were not satisfied with that modelling it would not be being put forward as an alternative access. You say that the reason that Sandleford wasn't being built-out was because of Warren Road. That is absolutely wrong. The reason Sandleford hasn't been built-out is because the developers up until now have been unable to work together to deliver the cohesive scheme that we as a local authority were demanding from them, because a cohesive scheme will deliver the much needed infrastructure around that development. I'm happy to say that we have now got two live planning applications in from developers that treat the site as a cohesive whole, but as that is still up for consideration I can say no more on that. However, I think you can be assured that our Highways and Transport Team have looked very, very carefully at the modelling for access to Warren Road.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a further 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?"*

Ms Julie Knapman: *"There were quite a few reasons within the Highway report that Warren Road wasn't acceptable?"*

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered: But further modelling has been done since the original report.

Ms Julie Knapman: *Ok, then we'll see.*

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a further 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?"*

Ms Julie Knapman declined to ask a final supplementary question.

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

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

"Given the most recent rejection by voters on charging for green waste collection, will the Administration now consider scrapping this policy?"

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:

Thank you Councillor Brooks and I'd like to add my welcome to that of the Leader. I presume, in your question, you are talking about the recent by-election in Thatcham West unless there's been some kind of a referendum that I haven't heard about?

You'll find that some 78% of people who voted in the Thatcham West by-election voted for parties who supported the principle of charging in this Chamber at our March budget meeting. This should come as no surprise to you, but your friends haven't told you what they've been up to. Your Group Leader, still Councillor Dillon by the way, tabled an amendment to our motion to introduce the garden waste charge but not to abolish the charge. No, it was to retain the charge but to use transformational funds, which, according to the Section 151 Officer's comments, could be better spent on other projects for the future benefit of West Berkshire; and to reduce the charge to £25 for the first year only, after that the £50 annual charge would stand. It appears that the Liberal Democrats agree with us on the garden waste charge and you're just haggling about the timing. Perhaps next time you'll find out what your party line is before you table any questions.

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'm not sure about the party line. I can tell you that the people in Thatcham West don't like this policy, period. So at what point will you consider abandoning the scheme if the receipts do not come up to the £900k that you anticipate in your budget? At what point would you reappraise it?"

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:

Thank you Councillor Brooks. Officers have carried out extensive and detailed modelling based upon experience in other authorities and we are confident that the take-up will deliver the £900,000 that we anticipate.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People by Councillor Mollie Lock:

"Given the lack of nursery provision in rural areas, what is the Council doing to make sure families can access the nursery provision they are entitled to?"

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

Thank you Councillor Lock for giving me the opportunity to report that this is not the case in West Berkshire and in fact in many rural areas, including your own Ward, there are actually more places available than there is current demand for extended hours placements. However, building on West Berkshire's excellent track record of meeting parental choice, we are not

being complacent and therefore we are taking steps to ensure that this continues. Such steps are:

Maintaining our Family Information Service, where parents can seek information about childcare providers in their area, the number of places offered and the vacancies that those particular providers have. We are using that to monitor and make sure that there's flexibility in arrangements going forward and to date there's been no evidence from the monitoring that parents in any rural areas are not able to access their entitlement to free childcare places.

In addition to that we are working with local providers and we regularly provide information, support and guidance around best practice and high quality early education needs and maintain that flow of information so that we can get advanced notice from any of our local providers.

We are working with parents to make sure that they are accessing the new free entitlement for working parents and meeting our authority and being quite flexible in the delivery of models that we need to put in place to meet their need. In addition, we are also identifying opportunities with local schools to extend their provision so that we can provide guidance and support in local schools. In fact, at our recent Budget Meeting you will recall that at the last School Council we agreed to access some capital expenditure to enable us to do that.

So I can reassure you that in West Berkshire that is not the case.

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 Mollie Lock asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do. Why is it that parents then come to me showing me this leaflet they picked up in the library and say we have this entitlement, but we have not the facility for the children to access this. Sometimes there's one village hall that they can only have for certain parts of the time and I have to say to them, yes it's an entitlement but it's not a statutory thing. How are we going to get it to our rural areas so that every child who's in this category, and we've got it here in this leaflet, 'is entitled to 30 hours'?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People answered: The entitlement is there for them to access, you're right. What we need to do is make sure they know how to access it and we're working hard with our Family Hubs who are going out to support points in those rural areas to make sure that message is communicated effectively. We have got the Family Information Service which is set up for that very need, to match parents with providers and make sure that they are accessing that. So my advice to you Councillor Lock is to make sure that families are aware of that process and the Family Information Service so that they can get the entitlement which is there, ready for them to access.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“How many pot holes have been reported since January 2018?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Dillon.

The number of reported pot holes made between 1st January and 31st March this year is 1,762 and I'd like to thank members of the public and others who took the time to make those reports.

I'm sure you're going to point out Councillor Dillon that that's a big number, and it is. It's about twice as many as were reported in the same period last year and there's one inescapable reason for that and you'll hear it up and down the country in every local authority whatever

political view. We've all endured the harshest winter for years. We've had snow, ice and an awful lot of rain, perfect conditions for pot holes to appear and by the laws of physics that's just what they've done, but we are responding. In West Berkshire we are sorting the pot holes out. We might have had twice as many reported as last year but we fixed four times as many as we did in this period last year, four times. We are hitting our targets. A pot hole that is an immediate hazard is made safe in two hours from the time the repair is ordered.

To challenging targets, we're meeting them and how are we doing that? We've got a great team but we also had very welcome additional severe winter funding announced last month by a government that knows how important it is to keep our roads in good condition and I'm pleased to confirm that we will in this year in West Berkshire spend almost 50% more on this sort of routine maintenance than we did last year. We have 6-8 operatives on permanent pot hole duty in West Berkshire and they're working hard. So hard that we are enjoying one or two compliments. Now I share initials with Jeremy Corbyn and I'm going to take one of his approaches, we've had an email, from John of Tilehurst and he said "just before the winter weekend I reported a number of pot holes in various locations via the West Berks website. I've been very impressed by your efficiency and prompt responses both via email and in dealing with the pot holes themselves" and John of Tilehurst goes on to say "this is in stark contrast to Reading to whom I also reported some pot holes via their website at the same time. As far as I'm aware, none of them has yet been attended to".

Now we try not to congratulate ourselves but John's been very helpful and he finishes like this "So well done West Berkshire and thank you." So we are full of ambition on pot holes. People are noticing we are doing a pretty good job, we are not complacent, we've got more to do and there was snow about three weeks ago but we are getting on with it.

Even though pot holes are a bit of an obsession with me and I should think they might be with you Councillor Dillon because you've asked me about them before. I have to tell you there's more to life than pot holes. This Council believes in prevention rather than cure which is why I'd remind you that while we've got on with curing the symptoms of pot holes more fundamentally we are making the whole network healthier. No matter how much some people huff and puff, there's no denying that the road condition in West Berkshire has improved hugely since the Conservatives took control of this Council, and, I see you are huffing and puffing so thank you for that, I've got the stats to prove it and they're independent stats. So how are we doing this? I've got an example: by a big resurfacing programme. We will have resurfaced 145 miles of network within this term.

We are doing what we said we'd do. Every part of the machine patching programme was completed last year, every part, and as you'd expect for a Council with a track record in innovation and ambition to deliver value for money we are looking at how we can deploy a new generation of exciting materials and techniques and I mean that, I'm so excited about this. One day, probably sometime in the future we might banish pot holes in West Berkshire forever, I don't know what we'll talk about then. But you'll be hearing more about this in months to come, so all this and fixing pot holes too.

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?" The Chairman afforded Councillor Dillon a degree of licence for his supplementary question based on this detailed response.*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

"Thank you Leader. So the supplementary is how many of those pot holes require a double fix, where they are not done correctly first time? And then the other concern I have, as the Leader has granted me some leeway here, is I reported some pot holes in Sagecroft Road and took a picture and sent it in and said in the email 'and a couple of hundred yards further back there are also some more'. The guys who have gone to do those pot holes have clearly driven over the other pot holes as well but haven't marked them up for repair and actually there are pot holes to

the north and to the south of that, of the large one that was reported. So in terms of efficiency is making sure when they're en route to mark up the pot hole before they even fix it, is making sure they are marking or clocking those and reporting them back in themselves. And just to pick up on the comment you made in your answer where you said you believe that prevention is better, but the Council did cut the rural verge maintenance budget for our rural roads as well, which is a preventative measure in place. So while it's fine to talk the talk, I don't think you're necessarily walking the walk. That might be because you're having to dodge so many pot holes."

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:

The suggestion they're not being done correctly, there are two different things. We have a temporary fix and we have a permanent fix and after the difficulties of this winter we made a decision that to meet our targets and to make sure that safety was the first priority, there were a great number of temporary fixes that went in, but these will be followed up. We had a choice, putting in temporary fixes quickly and covering as much as we could was the right approach. I can't tell you about Sagecroft Road but I can find out about it. I'm not clear whether they were all reported but if you want me to find out about what's happened of course I will do that, it'll be my pleasure. As far as the money we're spending, certainly as far as preventative activity like this on our road network goes, the funding comes from different areas and while the money that we were spending from within our own budget was less, more money came from central government which is obviously to the advantage of the residents of West Berkshire.

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