

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday 11 February 2021

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

Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/Bill Bagnell

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“Referring to the Online business case document for the A339 widening and London Rd Industrial Estate access scheme 11/11/2014 would the executive agree with me that several sections including 1.3.1 and 2.1.2 make it clear the junction is an integral part of the regeneration of the LRIE?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thank you very much Leader and thanks Mr Gotelee for your question. Before I answer it I do note that this evening you're asking your 13th and 14th questions in the last six months on the London Road Industrial Estate and the environmental issues on site. Now while I am of course always happy to answer questions at these public meetings on any matter, I should point out that it may save a lot of your time, if you wish, to submit all the queries you have about this site together. Either through me or direct to officers and we'll make every effort to provide informative answers. It is of course your prerogative however.

As you know Mr Gotelee this Conservative Administration will always seek to ensure the district is attractive to the business community and encourage new commercial opportunities across the district to ensure high employment and a strong local economy.

Our investment in infrastructure including the London Road Estate will help businesses to thrive and enable their economic and physical expansion and that is always our overarching priority relating to this site. To the junction, we shouldn't forget that the new junction has provided a number of strategic improvements in its own right, regardless of the redevelopment of the Estate. It's delivered traffic flow and air quality improvements on the A339 and Robin Hood roundabouts along with the provision of a pedestrian cycle crossing on the 339 which can be a significant barrier to active travel.

Going back to your question about whether it's integral to the development; we would have to ask ourselves: Could the redevelopment of this site be carried out without the new junction? Well the answer is: yes. It might not be the development we would prefer and the improved access this junction delivers allows for a higher quality development attracting the investment that will benefit the residents and businesses of Newbury. Thank you.

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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:

“Thanks for the very long answer Mr Mackinnon. I'm not quite sure whether you came out with a yes or a no on that; it appeared to be a no. In which case I would ask on what basis the funding was done?”

But if you're actually saying yes, it makes it clear that the screening was completely wrong blocking an environmental impact assessment. So would you now commit to doing an EIA before you do anything else with consultants or anything because this is something that can really put a spanner in your works, if it goes against you?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks Mr Gotelee. To go back to it the answer was a no. It wasn't integral because the development could have happened without it; so that's where I was going with that.

Relating to your question about the EIA, environmental assessment of the overall impact of regeneration on the site, that's an embedded part of the Local Plan process and that goes in front of an independent Inspector which has identified the potential for improvements in the area. So I would say that full consideration has been given to the impact; so thank you.

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Sarah Clarke/Joseph Holmes

(d) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Darren King:

“Would the council agree to have public meetings where the public can discuss topical issues with councillors rather than having the limited time for questions at council meetings?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you for your question Mr King. The Council is fully committed to both communicating and engaging with our communities, and that commitment is evident in our Communication and Engagement Strategy which was approved by the Executive last October. Indeed, I am of the belief that true engagement is not a single act such as questions at a Council meeting; but an ongoing process of a series of different types of communication or conversations.

We have already started to work towards this change in process. You may be aware of some of the enhanced activity in this regard that has taken place over the past year. This includes the holding of topic specific webinars where people can attend and ask questions. I myself have done a number of Facebook live events which facilitate open access, dialogue, and engagement with people living or working in the district. These sessions are less formal than Executive Questions, and enable far greater participation.

The sessions I have done have attracted between 60 to 110 residents who are able to ask questions direct, as well as everyone in the district having the opportunity to pre-submit questions. This is in stark contrast to the questions submitted to the Executive where only 21 people have submitted questions over the past year and nearly 50% of these questions come from only six people, with 27 being submitted by two individuals.

As Leader, I confirm that in my opinion the manner in which questions are permitted at Council meetings is not working, a view which I know is shared with others. I'm personally disappointed to say that during a year where we have been responding to a global pandemic, while still delivering a Council Strategy we know is important to our residents, of the 202 public questions received since last February, 85 referred to either the London Road, the football ground, or playing pitches. The range and the breadth of the questions is a concern; and unfortunately, does not involve everyone on topical and important issues, such as Covid Recovery, Adult Social Care or reach across the geographical district to pick up those in West Berkshire from the west, the east, and the surrounding villages.

Not only do the questions being asked have such a small breadth of topic, but it should be noted that the manner in which questions are submitted at the moment creates an

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administrative burden on the officers dealing with them. It therefore uses up valuable public resources at a time when our resources are always already stretched the limit delivering the Council's support to residents during Covid and continuing our business as usual services.

So Mr King, I do agree that we need to review how the public can discuss topical issues and I have already asked that this be reviewed.

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?”*

Darren King did not ask a supplementary question.



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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Janet Weekes/Gary Lugg

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Graham Storey:

“Does the Executive think it is acceptable that a low income couple with two young children, stuck living with parents in a 3 bedroom house, because they cannot afford to rent privately, can no longer join the housing list due to the recent changes in eligibility, and what would you advise that couple to do now that social housing is no longer even a hope for them?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Good evening Mr Storey and thank you for your questions. The housing register is a two-stage process in terms of eligibility and qualification. If an applicant is not subject to immigration control they are eligible to join the housing register. However, they may not qualify to join if they have enough bedrooms and living space for their household. This means they do not have a housing need and in the example given it is because they are not overcrowded. If the couple do not agree with the decision, then they can request a right for review, by writing to the housing allocations team at housingallocations@westberks.gov.uk for reconsideration of this decision.

The housing service can provide an appointment to go through alternative housing options. This can be arranged by sending an email to housing@westberks.gov.uk or by telephone on 01635 519530.

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?”*

Graham Storey asked the following supplementary question:

“I do, a clarification actually. I spoke to the housing team and they were adamant that under the new rules the absence of qualifying, so not being in one of the top four bands, meant people were no longer eligible to join the housing list. Am I mistaken in that, in that people can still join the housing list without being in one of those four bands and as before could they be able to bid on a house if there is no one in the higher points categories ahead of them?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I think you're confusing two issues if I'm honest Mr Storey. You're confusing the Housing Register which anybody is eligible to register with. However, we have changed our housing policy so that we do have the four categories as you mention

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with regard to the qualification for housing in West Berkshire. We do this and it operates within the parameters of law. The Allocations Policy is framed around the Housing Act 1996, the Localism Act 2011, the Homeless Reduction Act in 2017 and the Code of Guidance for Allocations. So, yes people can join the housing register but as I pointed out when I presented the paper at Council, just because people are on the Housing Register, you or I could go on the Housing Register, it doesn't mean that they qualify for housing.

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Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Simon Pike:

“Is it not premature for West Berkshire Council to abandon Grazeley as a major housing allocation and to plan a 75 acre solar farm there, given that the draft Local Plan only states that there are 'uncertainties' regarding this site?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thank you very much Leader and good evening Councillor Pike.

The answer to your question is no, it's not premature. Firstly, to put your reference to uncertainties into context, it's taken from the section of the Local Plan which is entitled Sites Allocated for Residential Development in Eastern Area.

Now that section, as the name would suggest, identifies such sites. That does not include any site in or near Grazeley amongst them. The supporting text includes (at paragraph 6.22) and I'm quoting: “Though Grazeley has been identified as a possible location for a new garden settlement there are uncertainties (as you reference) regarding the proximity to AWE Burghfield, funding for infrastructure, and delivery time scales. No strategic allocation is therefore made in this spatial area.” No allocation was ever made in Grazeley.

Now the fact that the DEPZ, the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone, for AWE Burghfield encompasses the entire area that was proposed for the Grazeley Garden Settlement, also, that the bid for in excess of £250M from the Housing Infrastructure Fund failed, and also that the MOD, through the Defence Nuclear Organisation, has made a formal objection to the Wokingham Borough Council draft Local Plan. All of those mean that the decision not to allocate any strategic site within this area is entirely understandable and very justified. Indeed Wokingham Borough Council recognises this and is consulting on changes as we speak to its Local Plan.

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?”*

Simon Pike asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes, thank you. So I don't think you answered one element of the question which is unclear from public documents, at least that I've seen: Does the Solar Farm occupy part of the area that would be part of the development if it had gone ahead or is it a different part of Grazeley? Thank you.”

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The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks Councillor Pike, in fairness, that wasn't made clear within your question as a question, but I will answer it. Yes it does, it forms parts of a farm, not all of a farm, part of a farm which itself made up part of the site of the Grazeley Development.

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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Bill Bagnell

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Does the Council honestly believe that there is a real and genuine need to use the Faraday Road football ground as a general recreation space when Victoria Park and Fireman's Field are right next to the estate?”

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

Thank you Councillor Miller. I understand this is the 13th question you've asked regarding this general topic in the last six months, however I am of course delighted to answer.

The availability of recreational space elsewhere is not really the issue. In respect of the old football ground, it is a choice between two practical options until the land is required for redevelopment. Keep the area closed or make use of it temporarily for public benefit once degraded infrastructure is removed. Keeping the ground closed would be the simplest solution for the Council, but instead the Council prefers to see it used by the public and in a way that does not require any management input from the Council and the costs to provide this are largely confined to removing poor infrastructure that needs demolishing regardless of future plans and making the area secure from unauthorised occupation.

Establishing levels of demand for areas of open space is not straightforward; but in the current context of Covid, it is clear that the Council recognises the ability to get outdoors and enjoy some informal physical activity is very desirable for residents. We recognise there will always be different and competing priorities for the use of these open spaces. I will be happy to liaise with Newbury Town Council to see how the wider area can be utilised more efficiently.

In line with previous answers, we would encourage any clubs who are struggling to find ways to deal with a fixture list congestion because of Covid restrictions to contact the Council's Sport and Leisure Team to support them.

Our priorities are firstly to meet the objectives of the Playing Pitch Strategy approved by this Council in February 2020 and in particular providing a suitable venue for both mens and ladies teams playing as Newbury Football Club and community facilities for more junior clubs. Secondly, to facilitate a major mixed-use comprehensive development opportunity for Newbury Town Centre at Faraday Road to enhance the town's attractiveness as a destination for economic development and resultant employment opportunities. I think we are making very significant progress on both

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fronts, thus the proposed temporary use of the former football ground for community recreational use pending future development makes perfect sense on this basis.

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:

“Thanks for the answer Councillor Woollaston. Councillor Mackinnon previously has mentioned two scenarios to justify this - family and friends either playing rounders or football at that recreational pitch. However, using one of those scenarios where some friends turn up to play football, the ball could hit a car or knock a wing mirror off one of the parked cars in one of the new car parking spaces. So given that, do the Council think it's good value for money spending £200,000 to have that as a recreational ground, rather than reopen it for the next three years as an extra football ground?”

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

Simple answer Councillor Miller, is yes I do. It seems to me inappropriate to leave this land just completely derelict and unused for two to possibly three years and the community should benefit from it.

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Item (m)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Bill Bagnell

(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Stewart:

“Does the Council agree that it is logical to have a redeveloped or new football ground somewhere on the London Road Estate, especially as the area is currently industrial/retail/office with no opposing residents and its future mixed/residential layout has yet to be planned?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thank you Leader and good evening Mr Stewart. I know you've asked a few questions about the old pitch before and I personally have answered this question or close variants of it several times and I expect on past form that I'll be asked it several times again but the answer is not going to change. The area occupied by the former pitch is integral to the regeneration of the Estate.

Now new sporting facilities anywhere on the London Road Estate would require substantial investment which the Council simply cannot justify for such a short period of time before regeneration. External investment would only be available if land was passed over on a long lease. Now the only areas of the LRIE that the Council has immediate control of are the old football ground and the site of the former Council Offices that were there on Faraday Road, and there's a vehicle depot adjacent to that.

Now to surrender control of that area or a substantial part of that area, via a long lease with vacant possession, would prevent the Council from initiating regeneration. That is sub-optimal to say the least particularly given that new and sustainable football facilities will be met by proposals to deliver a new facility at the Rugby Club.

Now, as previously stated, the future proposal makes use of the site and our unwavering objectives for the regeneration of the Estate are to ensure employment opportunities for local residents, to attract inward investment, and to enable existing businesses to thrive and grow. I'm very excited that we'll be providing that over the next few years.

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, it's difficult really to know how to put these questions if you're not very positive regarding how we're interacting with the Council; but do you agree that the current

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local residents will more likely object to a new sporting facility being developed near their existing homes, than one that is going to be developed in an as yet undeveloped area? I mean do you agree that you're going to be heading for more trouble trying to develop in the areas that you've identified, rather than the place that's ideally suited?"

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

No, I don't necessarily agree and I wouldn't like to put words in residents' mouths. Residents nearby the facility may be very enthusiastic about it once they've seen the high quality nature of the facility and the benefits there on. So no, I think neither you nor I can anticipate what residents are going to do.

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Item (n)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Bill Bagnell

(n) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Jason Braidwood:

“Will the Council reconsider re-opening the Faraday Road football ground for the summer to allow local youth football to catch up on the backlog of games due to COVID?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks again Leader and hello again Mr Braidwood. I remember you asking this as a supplementary question recently, Mr Braidwood. You asked a different question either at Executive or Council and this was your follow-up question. So I'm going to give you the same answer to this question as I did then.

The Council is not considering exclusive use of the site for any one group. I've made it very clear on many occasions that the Council wishes to make the space available to the public as general recreational space. In the immediate, very short term, there are management and security issues relating to use of the site before reuse of the area by anyone, as a minimum existing degraded boundary infrastructure must be removed or replaced and that work really can only be done cost effectively in tandem with the demolition of the old clubhouse. Thank you.

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?”*

Jason Braidwood asked the following supplementary question:

“Thanks Councillor Mackinnon. Last time if you recall my Wi-Fi had gone a bit dodgy and so I didn't hear the full reply, so thank you for your answer. With clearly not enough football playing facilities in the area and following the latest headline on Newbury Weekly News Today with a focus on children's health and well-being, don't you think it would be great to reopen the football ground for now for children to play football again while we await the fate of Newbury Rugby Club? I mean I'm being inundated with correspondence from parents asking when their kids can start playing football again. So I'm just asking, would you please consider engaging with us in the football community to reopen the football ground for this to happen as you guys would probably get some more fantastic positive feedback in doing this?”

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The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks for that Mr Braidwood and I appreciate your comments. I mean you've asked the question really again which I've answered so I'm not going to change it. What I would say is that the Council does have other football pitches available which youth teams, mens teams, ladies teams can use. So I know it's not the answer you want to hear and I do appreciate it and sympathise with it, but it's the answer that I'm sticking to.

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Item (o)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey

(o) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Jack Harkness:

“If the proposals for the Rugby Club and/or the Diamond Field do not meet the requirements and policies of Sport England and the FA will the Council still go ahead with these options?”

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

Thank you Mr Harkness. In a word no, the Council is committed to meeting the objectives of the Playing Pitch Strategy. We continue to work closely with Sport England and the Football Association to find the right solutions and have no reason to suppose they have any objections at present.

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?”*

Jack Harkness asked the following supplementary question:

“Well really the supplementary is based on that answer. I mean are you feeling you're absolutely guaranteed to get approval from Sport England and the FA for the replacement of the Faraday Road ground? Based on the proposal we've seen so far it doesn't seem to qualify as a replacement for Faraday Road.”

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

One can never give a guarantee Mr Harkness as you know, but to the best of my knowledge it is likely.

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Item (p)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell

(p) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paul Morgan:

“Can the Council (or a property developer) share with us the current timescales / plans to submit a planning application to build flats on the Newbury Faraday Road Football Ground?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thank you Leader and hello again Mr Morgan. I'm a little bit puzzled with this question and I know you've asked a few about this as well and several of your previous questions you've referred to a property developer. You refer to a property developer here as well and I'm just confused why in your question you speculate that a property developer might be able to share current timescales and plans. What developer do you mean? There's no developer involved in the project.

If you think you know differently then please do enlighten us. From the Council's point of view, it's too early to confirm timescales since there are a number of important variables which will dictate the programme, some of those are in the Council's control and some of them aren't. Matters which are in the Council's control are being reviewed now and we hope to have more certainty in the months ahead, and at that point we'll be happy to make that information 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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do. Let me help you out Councillor Mackinnon there about your confusion. The reason I asked the question about the developer is because it's either the Council or the developer who will put a planning application in and I just wondered whether you've got any further forward on that on that basis. Putting that to one side, you stated in response to question 'm' that the Rugby Club will happen and I think Councillor Woollaston also has said the same thing.

Can you confirm though that any timescale for any planning application, whether it be from yourselves or a property developer or Uncle Tom Cobley and all, whoever puts the planning application in, will be 100% dependent upon the replacement football facility being open before any planning application can be put forward? Can you confirm that any planning application cannot go ahead until a replacement facility is open, that's my question?”

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The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

As I understand it, and I stand to be corrected, part of a planning application for what happens on the old ground will be dependent on Sport England's being happy with what we have elsewhere. That's my understanding, I'm not the Planning Portfolio Holder so I don't want to say 100% certain, but that's my understanding.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“When an Environmental impact assessment is eventually done, if it indicates substantial extra cost that makes the LRIE unviable or unfeasible where does that leave the taxpayer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Known issues at the moment are not viewed as being so significant as to make development in some of the areas on the estate financially unviable. Detailed assessments will inform what needs to be done to make any planning applications acceptable. Now it's possible, that requirements may curtail what the Council wishes to do rather than prevent it moving forward altogether and there is always an element of risk of course isn't there in taking forward major projects like this. Public bodies like our Council must sometimes undertake potentially aborted costs, effectively these are feasibility studies, in order to try and deliver important schemes that have a major public benefit.

Now considering our ability to regenerate this important but run down part of Newbury, the Council really has had to commit an early stage to two tranches of important and expensive work. So there are the commercial implications of the redevelopment and the related issues there of viability, and then there are the environmental implications of redevelopment and again related into issues of viability; but the former has been satisfied in the recently published Development Brief. The latter will be satisfied by carrying out an Environmental Impact Assessment and it is entirely logical to carry that out after the commercial review since the vast majority of the LRIE has already been physically developed over the past 40 years without any issue.

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, now the thing is you've already spent a lot of money on this Estate and we are where we are, there was a major error with St Modwen. This Environmental Impact Assessment could be a lot of extra money. Does the Council actually have public indemnity insurance in case it spends another couple of million or in case with the junction, the funders want their money back because of failure which is in the clause by the way?”

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The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I'm not aware of the public indemnity insurance position of the Council but I'm sure I can get that information to you Mr Gotelee in due course.

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Bryan Lyttle

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Simon Pike:

“Given that construction of replacement storage and processing facilities at AWE Burghfield may lead to a reduction in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone, what implications would this have on the feasibility of allocating a large housing site at Grazeley?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing provided the following written answer:

Thank you for your question Mr Pike.

Since the Council first made policies to control development around the two AWE facilities in the Core Strategy 2012 there has been significant development at AWE. Under the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019, AWE is required to review and revise their hazard evaluation and consequence assessment whenever a material change to the work with ionising radiation is planned. Should the new developments mean that there is a material change in the work they do then a review would be necessary. Regardless to any changes on site there is a requirement to undertake a formal review every 3 years. The latest review was undertaken in 2019 with the DEPZ determined in March 2020. It should be noted however that the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) may reduce in size or it may increase as a result of the procedures required in the legislation.

As a result I cannot say what will happen to the DEPZ following further redevelopment of the storage and processing facilities at AWE Burghfield and therefore cannot advise in relation to the feasibility of development of a large housing site in the Grazeley area.

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Item (k)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Carolyn Richardson

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Simon Pike:

“What consultation did West Berkshire Council have with Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils during the development and determination of the AWE Detailed Emergency Planning Zone, and did they agree to it?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Pike.

The process of determining the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) is set out in the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019, the associated Approved Code of Practice and Guidance. In so doing consultation took place with the AWE Off-Site Planning Group which is a multi-agency group and includes representatives from both Reading and Wokingham Councils. Both Councils fed back into that consultation process, both at Officer and political leader level, with an extension to the consultation period provided to allow for additional meetings to take place to discuss the proposals made. The result of this feedback was that some changes were made to the final shape of the DEPZ which was determined by this Council in March 2020. This determination was in line with the legislation and accepted by the officers representing the agencies on the AWE Off-Site Planning Group.

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Shiraz Sheikh/Bill Bagnell/Paul Anstey

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Ian Hall:

“Was it wise not to seek internal or external advice on the closure of the football pitch given the legislation and the protections afforded to football pitches by Her Majesty’s Government?”

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

The football ground closed because the lease had come to an end and there were no legal grounds nor planning obligations requiring the Council to enter into a new lease. In these circumstances external advice would not have been appropriate and internally the Council was fully satisfied it followed due process in taking back Vacant Possession.

It should be remembered future proposals in respect of Newbury football are not a legal matter but a planning process and where, in respect of the latter, the Council is fully aware of current policy and taking all steps required to ensure proposals satisfy policy and legislation in order to make any future planning application acceptable to statutory bodies.

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Nick Carter/Joseph Holmes/Sarah Clarke

(e) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Gary Puffett:

“Does the Leader of the Council feel her organisation is being “caring and compassionate” by laying off public servants with no performance or disciplinary problems in the midst of a National health emergency that has tragically seen over 100,000 people lose their lives?”

The Leader of the Council provided the following written answer:

Thank you for this question. I would like to start off by saying clearly and categorically that yes, I do believe that West Berkshire Council is a caring and compassionate organisation.

As an organisation, the Council values its officers, who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. The challenges placed on officers have been recognised and understood, and appropriate levels of support have been put in place. Since the start of the first lockdown, the Council has adopted a ‘family first’ approach, allowing flexible working and understanding for those officers who have caring responsibilities.

Throughout the first lockdown, written weekly updates were provided to all staff and I along with our Chief Executive, Nick Carter have held regular ‘Let’s Chat’ sessions, attracting up to 300 staff at a time to not only provide updates to officers but also an opportunity for them to raise any matters concerning them, directly with the Chief Executive or myself. These sessions have been well received and I have had many emails from staff thanking us for the support we have given.

In addition to these sessions we have implemented an Employee Assistance Programme, which enables officers to access independent support and advice, free of charge.

The Council has issued honorariums to a number of staff in recognition of their exceptional work during the Lockdown, including all those working in our care homes. At the annual staff recognition event in December, we announced that we were also awarding an extra day of leave to all officers, as a thank you for everything that they have done over the past year.

I believe that the steps taken by the Council, some of which I have outlined in this response, therefore demonstrate how we are a caring and compassionate organisation and employer, and how we value and support our officers.

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It must be recognised however, that the Council primarily exists to support the communities of West Berkshire. Public services should be run in the interest of the public. That means that we need to ensure that the Council provides residents and customers with the services they need, in the most effective and efficient manner. The Council is committed via the Council Strategy to providing sustainable services through innovation and partnerships. This means that it is incumbent upon us to review how we operate and to embrace change and the opportunities presented by developing technology.

The purpose of the new structure in Strategy & Governance is to:

- Improve the delivery of services to the Council's customers
- Enhance and consolidate the Council's governance arrangements
- Deliver more effective digital and transformation solutions that provide better services
- Continue to provide effective support services to the Council

In order to achieve the stated purpose of the restructure, a number of existing posts need to be deleted. However, new posts have been created and with the additional investment proposed as part of the budget, there will in fact be an increase of employment opportunities in the Strategy & Governance Department.

The Council undertakes restructures in accordance with its organisational change policy. This means that where an officer is placed at risk of redundancy because their post is being deleted, they will be offered dedicated support to find suitable alternative employment within the Council. If an officer is redeployed into a post which is a grade lower, they will automatically receive salary protection for up to 18 months. As is apparent from the Part I report on this matter, redundancies are a last resort.

As Leader, it is my responsibility to take decisions that are not always easy, but I need to ensure that the valued services we provide to our public can continue into the future and are enhanced and continually improving; sometimes, this will mean changing how we are structured to do so, with resources being moved around and services invested in, and this is exactly the purpose of this structure – to invest in the better delivery of public services.

It is of vital importance to me that we continue to be an employer that supports our staff, so that they have opportunities to develop, to improve what they do and so that we achieve the best outcomes for our residents and businesses.

All of these elements are crucial to us delivering better services. Critically, and even more so in the current pandemic, we need services that are resilient, and this is exactly what this new structure will provide.

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Joseph Holmes/Sarah Clarke

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Thomas Tunney:

“As the pending redundancies in the council will naturally affect services to the public, what efforts were made to ask for the opinion of residents on the proposals to help build a business case that would support them?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance provided the following written answer:

Thank you for your question.

I would like to begin by confirming that the potential redundancies will have no adverse impact on services provided to the public. Indeed, the proposed restructure actually includes investment in the service, which will result in improvements to service delivery and customer engagement. These improvements will be made through investment and improvements in digital and transformation activities, and by ensuring greater resilience across the team.

The Council is fully committed to consultation and engagement. The Council's position in this regard is fully set out in its Consultation and Engagement Strategy and its Consultation Policy.

Consultation should only ever be undertaken where that will be effective and where that enables meaningful contributions to be made. The details of the proposals which result in the potential redundancies affect a number of people employed by the Council, and those details are therefore exempt from publication. That is why there was a Part II report on the Executive agenda of last Thursday evening.

In the absence of all the details about the proposals, it would be impossible for somebody to give a meaningful view of the same. Therefore, we have not sought the opinion of those living and working in the district, because it would not be appropriate for us to do so in the circumstances.

I would also like to stress however that the individuals impacted by these proposals (i.e. the officers concerned), have been consulted extensively in a variety of ways including over 40 briefing and consultation meetings, in addition to the formal written consultation process. The consultation feedback was considered and resulted in several changes being made to the proposals. Staff consultation was undertaken in accordance with the Council's well-established Organisational Change Policy.

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The new structure is supported by the over-arching Senior Management Restructure proposals which were approved by the Executive in March 2019.

The proposed budget, also presented at the Executive meeting, and which will be debated at Full Council on 2 March, highlights the investment proposed to provide enhancements to the Council's service delivery; this budget includes a wide range of investment across the district in both the revenue budget and capital budget and over a variety of services.

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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Joseph Holmes/Sarah Clarke

(h) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mark Beach:

“Does the council feel that investment in communications and public relations – non-statutory activities – are more important than investment in services required by statute?”

The Leader of the Council provided the following written answer:

Thank you for this question Mr Beach.

The Council does not consider that investment in communications is more important than investment in our statutory services. However, the Council does consider that investment in those services which support our statutory functions, such as communications, is absolutely essential.

It is clear that effective communication and engagement is vital if local authorities are to ensure their services, and the way they are delivered, meet the needs of the residents they serve. This was highlighted by the Corporate Peer Review undertaken in 2019, which suggested that the Council enhance its approach to communications by being more proactive and engaging stakeholders so that they *“know more about what is going on, what the ambitions for the place are and how they can help shape things.”*

In October last year, the Council adopted a Communications and Engagement Strategy, which will help to support the Council in reaching the ambitions set out in the West Berkshire Vision and the Council Strategy. The Communications and Engagement Strategy, (which is available on the Council's Website,) demonstrates how we intend to do that.

The Council wishes to engage with communities across the district to realise the ambitions set out in the 2036 Vision, such as reducing health inequalities and ensuring that everyone has what they need to fulfil their potential. In seeking to enhance that engagement and improve access to those statutory services to which you refer, the Council needs to improve its engagement with individuals and communities whose voice is often not heard. We consider that it is therefore important to take action to reach those who we are aware have been less engaged with us historically, such as younger people, people from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) communities and those who are economically disadvantaged, which also aligns with some of those most impacted by Covid-19.

I hope that the answer to your question demonstrates why it is impossible to look at the Council's support services in isolation. Activities such as communications, are

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essential services which provide essential support in the delivery of statutory services, and in helping our communities to access the same.

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

Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Matt Pearce

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Tony Vickers:

“Apart from parking restrictions on roads near the more popular country parks, what can the Council urgently do to not just attempt to control but to capitalise on the massively increased and welcome enthusiasm for much-needed healthy outdoor country exercise on foot around our major settlements?”

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

Councillor Vickers, thank you for your question. It is excellent news that the public is making more use of our beautiful countryside during this incredibly difficult time. Indeed continuing and encouraging this trend features prominently in the Council's Covid19 Recovery Plan. However, I'm sure you appreciate that one of the unintended consequences has been some inconsiderate parking around some of the district's most popular destinations. Our foremost concern in introducing these temporary parking restrictions is our responsibility to ensure safety of the traveling public.

To emphasise our commitment to encouraging the continuation of this trend, I'm sure you have been pleased about the additional investment in access to the countryside, outdoor activities and visitor experience have been identified in the Council's draft three-year Capital Programme (£1.8m compared to £1.1m in the previous three years). We will also continue to work with key partner organizations to improve their offering.

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 Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes thank you Leader, thank you Councillor Woollaston. For the benefit of any members of the public who've struggled through this far, although I'm a Liberal Democrat, I asked this question as the Council's cross party representative on the Local Access Forum so there's no hidden traps in my supplementary.

I wondered if in addition to the excellent measures that are listed in the Capital Programme, mainly around rights of way, we note that there are minor roads, some of them quite close to towns like Newbury and Thatcham and probably Tilehurst as well and Hungerford, which are now increasingly used by walkers who are taking their lives at risk to get to the nearest rights of way network. So can we include in the measures,

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perhaps with the help of your colleague Councillor Somner, some measures to make the minor roads safer as well as prettier with flowers as I know we're trying to do with the wildflower scheme; so can we just not leave that out?

Controlling is a slightly negative thing that one has to do and, as you've explained it Councillor Woollaston, it is to do with irresponsible parking. However, roads are also places where walkers sometimes have to go and for their own safety we need to look at not just improving the rights of way but the road links particularly near the major towns where a lot of people who aren't wanting to use their car, they get to the rights of way network or they get to a country park via a road and the roads are dangerous and are also needing to be looked at for safety measures. Thank you."

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

I completely concur with your point Councillor Vickers and we have been looking at whether we can create some minor footpaths to overcome the problem.

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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Matt Pearce

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Martha Vickers:

“How satisfactory as a basis for developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the next decade can a response to the consultation of under 700 in West Berkshire be in a population of at least 50,000 households?”

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

Thank you Councillor Martha Vickers. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Berkshire West is as an important one that will provide direction for improving the health and wellbeing of our residents over the next ten years. We therefore recognise that it is vital that we can hear from our residents about their needs and so enable them to have a say in the development of the Strategy. Berkshire West, which for the uninitiated includes West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading, has a combined population of well over half a million people.

The public survey for the Strategy has been open since early December 2020. So far we have had over 1800 responses in total including: over 600 from West Berkshire residents, 700 from Reading residents over 400 from Wokingham residents. We will continue to explore all possible avenues to further promote the survey and increase the response rate before the survey closes at the end of this month. This includes targeting promotion towards specific groups that we have identified as having lower response rates.

Much as we would obviously prefer a higher response rate, we do not live in a country, thankfully, that can force people to take part in consultations. We can only make the opportunity available and encourage a response, and although this survey is an important part it is only one strand in the overall public engagement with the development of the Strategy.

To provide some examples, Healthwatch have facilitated several focus groups targeted at harder to reach groups including: maternity, carers, young people, older people, individuals from the diverse ethnic communities, and those with learning disabilities.

We held three virtual public meetings and all residents across the three areas. All Town and Parish Councils, and voluntary sector organizations across West Berkshire have been contacted and invited to engage with the Strategy development.

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We have met with numerous other organisations and groups including: patient voice meetings, young carers support groups, the Learning Disability Partnership Board, and the Ageing Well Partnership. There is a toolkit available to support organisations to hold discussions with their members and we receive feedback from a variety of other groups in this way.

We are committed to using all possible options for public engagement to ensure that we can hear from as many residents as possible through the public survey. However, we also see the value in targeting smaller groups which enable a rich and robust exploration of issues raised. We believe the use of both approaches will enable us to develop a Health and Wellbeing Strategy which meets the needs of our residents.

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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you Councillor Woollaston that was a very full response and it is good to hear about the other ways that the Council is trying to consult. But even so, that under 700 still seems to be quite a low figure when one hears of better responses to other consultations and I was just going to ask are there other ways of engaging people that could be considered because this is such an important subject, maybe we could initiate a debate or a citizen's assembly? Debates been raised earlier in this meeting just to try and engage others that don't engage. So I'm just asking for some further thoughts about innovative responses.”

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

I think I've answered a lot of that already Councillor Vickers, but I'm happy to look at other alternatives which perhaps could be raised at the steering group that we have, rather than the Health and Wellbeing Board, which you're obviously a Member of.

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Sarah Clarke/Shiraz Sheikh

(d) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor David Marsh:

“In view of the importance of the issue and the long-term implications for West Berkshire council tax payers, will you commit to a debate and vote by the full council before any final decision is taken over the proposed new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club?”

The Leader of the Council provided the following written answer:

Thank you for your question Cllr Marsh.

The new sports ground proposed at Newbury Rugby Club, which is currently a proposal which is out for public consultation, is scheduled to return to the Executive.

As you have raised a question of governance, I have consulted the Monitoring Officer regarding this question.

I can confirm that, “The Council has adopted an Executive model of governance, which means that certain matters are reserved by law to Council, and others are reserved to Executive. The decision on the proposed new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club is one which must be taken by the Executive.

I will not therefore commit to a debate or a vote at full Council as the final decision cannot therefore be determined by Council.”

Clearly, any Member who wishes to ask questions regarding the proposal when it comes forward, will be entitled to attend Executive to do so. I would also encourage you to take part in the survey.

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Erik Pattenden:

“If the Newbury Sports Ground at the Rugby Club does not go ahead, what facilities does the council propose for the Plan B site of the Diamond Field in Greenham and what impact would these have on local residents?”

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

Thank you Councillor Pattenden. As you know, at present, we fully expect Plan A to be successful and provide an exemplar community facility for Newbury and particularly community football.

However, in the unlikely event of it failing the scope and objectives of this project would remain the same. As a Plan B, officers would undertake the same process as before, looking at the various elements of the proposals and evaluating the pros and cons for the Executive to make a decision. As stated in the last Executive meeting, these proposals would also be consulted upon to enable local residents to express their views.

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 Erik Pattenden asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes thank you Councillor Woollaston. So if that were to be the case, you know worst case scenario Plan A doesn't go ahead, when do you think a consultation for Plan B is likely?”

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

The intention at the moment is that assuming Plan A does succeed, it will go for approval by Executive at the end of April. I would imagine therefore to be looking at consultation sometime the early summer.

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Bryan Lyttle

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Phil Barnett:

“Can the Executive member identify how many extra housing units have been created through a change in use from office blocks to residential accommodation over the last three years?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Barnett.

Following the change in legislation to allow offices to convert to residential dwellings, West Berkshire has seen many applications for this type of development. In the three years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20, we saw 101 units completed and there were 722 units with permission but not built yet.

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 Phil Barnett asked the following supplementary question:

“Thanks very much for that answer Councillor Cole. The supplementary is as follows: are you aware how much West Berkshire Council would have lost, obviously in business rates, due to the closure of the offices and how much of Council Tax would be lost prior to the occupation of the new tenants for these properties?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you Councillor Barnett. I can't give you an answer now, but I will get a written answer to you.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Sean Murphy

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Martha Vickers:

“What is the Council doing to tackle the problem of dog fouling in our streets and open spaces?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Vickers. The Public Protection Partnership carries out regular site visits to places where complaints are made. The sites are prioritised based on the level of complaint and we try to make complaining as easy as possible.

The more information we receive, the easier it is to ensure we target our resources appropriately. We also encourage dog owners to behave responsibly through a variety of media campaigns. Where necessary we consider formal action, including penalty notices, to demonstrate our commitment to preventing such anti-social behaviour.

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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you Councillor Cole for your answer. My supplementary would be whether the Council has the capacity to respond to complaints if there were many of these, knowing that the service has been reduced over the years? Also should the Council's valuable resources be spent in this way by providing this service or increasing it? Or should we be considering whether dog owners themselves should contribute to this service? And maybe one option would even be considering the return of the dog licence. Have you any thoughts on that?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Well to answer your last question first, the return of the dog licence is not within the remit of this authority it is a national issue.

I would say that it is the Public Protection Partnership over the three Berkshire authorities, Bracknell, Wokingham and West Berkshire, who are responsible for the work. We employ two animal wardens, alongside other administrative support staff, to form part of the wider animal warden service and they are tasked with promoting positive animal welfare matters and responsible dog ownership. As I've said we

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approach this subject on two fronts, namely education and enforcement, so the dog wardens are employed across three authorities and the cost of those is borne by the three authorities and I don't think that we are deflecting any resources, valuable resources, into this service because there is a proper provision made for this service.

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 11 February 2021
Submitted to:	Andy Sharp/Matt Pearce

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor Erik Pattenden:

“With the impact of the pandemic on young people increasing, how can the Council provide more funding and resources for organisations supporting children’s physical and mental health, such as the Emotional Health Academy, CAHMS and Time to Talk?”

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

Thank you Councillor Pattenden. West Berkshire Council continues to provide emotional and mental health support to children and young people as part of our Covid response through a range of existing services such as the Emotional Health Academy, Time to Talk and the CCG funded schools mental health support team. In addition, along with partners in the CCG and other local authority areas in Berkshire West, we have jointly commissioned and funded the Kooth online support service to complement our existing resources, I’ve spoken about Kooth before, it is a great service.

All of these services provide positive support for children and young people, and, as with other service offers, if capacity in these areas fell below levels of demand as a result of Covid there is a process by which additional funding can be requested to address any shortfall.

The Council also recently supported the children's mental health week by providing schools with guidance around the services and activities that can be accessed by children and young people across the district. This included the children's mental health week assembly which was held on the 1st February and was available to all schools and families. The plant a positivity tree project, which followed the successful planting of positivity trees at St Bart's, John O'Gaunt and Trinity, encouraging pupils to create their own, either at home, or at school for pupils attending school. The resources provided to schools throughout this period also included information to support and encourage pupils to undertake physical activity, to eat well, and recognise the importance of sleep in both physical and mental wellbeing.

On top of this there is a whole range of small and localised initiatives that have been instigated by our public health team, by our schools improvement team, which involves things like social media campaigns. You may already have had sight of these, as parents are across the district, because we've written to schools giving them guidance, signposting them to a lot of these initiatives. But if you haven't then let me know and I'll send you some information on that.

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Our education psychology service are ensuring that the DfE funded wellbeing for education return program is being rolled out and schools are supported by the health and wellbeing in schools programme through a whole range of particular activities such as the active travel to schools programme, advice for schools to implement the daily mile, I can tell you more about that if you like, and living well workshops for all year three children. On top of all this, we hope to be announcing in the next week or two, further support arrangements that we're going to deliver through the third sector, through the not for profit sector, which will support residents of all ages with mental health concerns.

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 Erik Pattenden asked the following supplementary question:

“I do thank you. Councillor Boeck, you will have seen the headline in today's Newbury Weekly News with a focus on children's emotional wellbeing. You've described a lot of initiatives there, but I'm afraid to say in a lot of cases the waiting time to get onto those programmes is just too long and I wonder how you can bring down those waiting times?”

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

I'm sorry to say Councillor Pattenden that I haven't seen the Newbury Weekly News today. I don't doubt that there's an article there about waiting times but without knowing the specifics I can't respond immediately, but as soon as I pick the paper up tomorrow I'll drop you a note and answer your specific concerns.

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