

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday, 3rd November, 2022

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Executive Meeting

3 November 2020

Questions and Answers

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

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| Item (A) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“Regarding document "Issues relating to the old football ground" section 7 it states the financial risk will need supporting by capital receipts from housing. The only part of the estate where delivery of housing is not a significant challenge in terms of flood zones and protected employment land is the old football ground. Can you explain how the U turn to now use the land for commercial will generate enough capital receipts?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Can I refer you to the West Berkshire Website (<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/lrie>), and specifically the FAQ section.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

“Why has the GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE SPD promised in Planning Policy CS18 adopted on 26th July 2012 not materialised?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for your question.

At the time of producing the Core Strategy in 2010 it had been envisioned that a Green Infrastructure SPD would have been produced to expand on CS18. However, with the introduction of Neighbourhood Development Plans it was felt that a Green Infrastructure SPD was not needed as local NDPs would cover this issue.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“So that was what was adopted for CS18, which is now superseded by SP10, the subject of my second question. I would just like you to take into account what your sustainability appraisal of December 2020, Appendix 4 said about that approach. It intimates that it would have been better having progressed with the more detailed GI work, but I will write to you with the wording.”

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Richard Bobrucki:

"Bearing in mind that that it's been publicly declared by WBC to be ready to open to Newbury residents in summer 2023. Please may I ask if there has been any delay, for any reason, in the on-site works required to redevelop the Newbury Lido?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

There have been no delays to the schedule at present, in fact we are ahead of programme. The stabilisation works to the ground below the pool tank and around the tank have already been completed and we are on schedule for the submission of the planning application. We remain committed to reopening the refurbished Lido in July 2023.

The Portfolio Holder 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?"*

Richard Bobrucki asked the following supplementary question:

"You have obviously done a risk assessment on possible causes of delay. What is the biggest potential risk to prevent the Lido opening in the summer of 2023, as promised to Newbury residents?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Although there is a limited amount of the project that needs planning consent, it would be planning, but the main parts of the Lido will be able to open regardless.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Paul Morgan:

"Bearing that the main purpose of the "Levelling Up Fund", as the name suggests, is to "assist and focus on the most deprived areas across the UK", does the Council genuinely believe that submitting a £3.5 million bid for the Newbury Lido is a) appropriate and b) justifiable?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

In West Berkshire 14.2% of adults and nearly 50% of children are considered to be inactive (as outlined in the Leisure Strategy). A key objective of the strategy is to get more people who are currently inactive to be active.

The public consultation for the leisure strategy showed that swimming had the second highest level of participation after walking and that key issues for increasing activity included more lessons and coaching and longer opening periods for leisure centres.

The new lido will offer vastly improved accessibility for people with disabilities and limited mobility. Additionally, the new 6 month extended opening will provide more opportunities for adults and children to attend learn to swim courses, participate in water-based exercise classes, family fun sessions and extended times for club use.

West Berkshire whilst a relatively affluent part of the UK does have areas of deprivation. If funding is provided through the levelling up fund it will contribute significantly to levelling up the health inequalities within West Berkshire and is wholly appropriate and justified.

To be clear levelling up is not about stopping funding to the South East in favour of other regions. HM Government has said it is committed to delivering the 2019 Conservative Manifesto which made clear that it would invest to level **up every** part of the United Kingdom. Specifically, it said how "we need to get away from the idea that 'Whitehall knows best' and that all growth must inevitably start in London" – this is an excellent local project that started here in West Berkshire, it has been welcomed by the local community, and we are hopeful that we will be able to receive funding for it.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

"Thank you for that comprehensive response Councillor Woollaston. I notice that you have applied for £3.5 million, I notice that the costs are £5 million. Would it be possible to look at the application that you submitted to the Levelling Up Committee so that I can review the business case and what the justification for that would be?"



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The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

May I consult with Officers first please and then get back to you.

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

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| Item (E) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
| Submitted to: | Martin Dunscombe |

(E) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Alan Pearce:

“Please would the Council explain why it released a promotional video for Newbury Electronics Ltd on the 27th of July 2022 that was created by the Council’s in house Comms team and paid for by the residents of West Berkshire?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

At West Berkshire Council we are proud of what we are delivering for local people, the support we are providing and our relationships with residents and businesses. Where we can, we aim to reflect our communities in the content we share to promote the district as a place to live, to visit, to learn and to do business.

Where we involve local businesses it is not to promote them specifically but to show residents the impact of the work we are doing in the community. In the case of Newbury Electronics, we were pleased to work with them to reflect the town’s position as tech hub and as a thriving business on the London Road Industrial estate. It served the dual purpose of promoting Newbury as somewhere which is open for business and supporting our work explaining why redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate is an important part of the town’s evolution.

We have worked with other businesses too, including:

- Showing how the Additional Restrictions Grants have been supporting local business: with Fleetwood Studios in Mortimer and Eco Timber Solutions in Newbury
- Promoting West Berkshire as being open for business by sharing why Cotswold Fayre moved to Theale
- Promoting our Shop Local, Shop Green directory with The Curve in Hungerford and the Hampsted Norreys Community Shop

We are proud to work with local businesses to show what the district has to offer and how the council supports local businesses and look forward to continuing doing so.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for the comprehensive answer. As a rate payer I do have an issue with a promotional video being made for one single company. I could have understood if it was for all the companies on the London Road Industrial Estate but for one company to have a specific promotional video made for itself, do you think I’m justified in not being happy with that?”

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

The Leader of the Council answered:

No I don't because I don't think it was a promotional video. The video, as I have just explained is to show how West Berkshire Council work with businesses across the piece and we've got lots of different examples of businesses we have used to do exactly that.

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

Item (F)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by Simon Pike:

“What is the average and maximum length of time for the Council to respond to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol) and/or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

Response times vary greatly depending on the time period involved and there is no central record of the time taken, only how many have requests been responded to in the statutory time period which is 20 working days.

This was 70% within time for January-March and 60% for April-June. Figures for July-September are currently being processed.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

“The legislation requires that all of them are responded to within 20 working days, but in addition it says that you have to respond promptly and the ICO guidance says that an authority that provides its response close to or on the final day of the 20 working day limit ought to be able to account for and justify the length of time taken to comply with the request. So how do you account for and justify the time that is being taken by West Berkshire Council to respond to its Freedom of Information and EIR requests? As you probably weren't aware of the legislation I will understand if you have to respond in writing.”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

I'm happy to explain. The council has experienced some delays recruiting to the solicitor post that supports the function. The post has now been filled and a Solicitor started with the authority in late September. The information governance administrator who supported the function also secured a promotion within the authority and left the information governance team at the end of July, so there have been a few issues in terms of recruitment. We tried and were not able to secure an administrative assistant to the role via agency therefore we've moved an internal resource to the team to assist until the process is complete. A project manager has also been assigned to progress the procurement of a new digital system which will assist improving the process and time for FOI requests. I hope that assists in providing the context for why performance has dropped. Measures have been taken to improve this and service and if you have any further concerns please feel free to write.

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

Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

"I cannot find any links or pages on the web site which relate to Existing Green/Blue Infrastructure work in place for West Berks showing Mapped Sub Categorized Open Spaces, and the possibilities for creation and improvement of Local Nature Recovery Networks and wildlife corridors, so if a mapped GBI Strategy/Framework/SPD does not exist what will be produced for the Section 19 Consultation of the Local Plan Review as a GBI Framework usually forms part of the Evidence for this phase?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for your question which I will answer in three parts;

You are correct there is no layers on the Council Online Map relating to Green/Blue Infrastructure for members of the public to view. The Council has a policy as to not replicate information that is already available on the internet. Most of the GBI information for example is available on the MAGIC website.

The Local Nature Recovery is being undertaken jointly across Berkshire as a partnership with the other local authorities and stakeholders and is independent of the Local Plan Review.

Finally, we are committed to producing a GBI SPD and the timetable for doing so has been published in the Local Development Schedule.

The Portfolio Holder 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?"*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

"In the Sustainability Appraisal, Appendix 4, it commented that the previous approach relying on NDPs had left you open to relying a great deal on negotiation and the willingness of parties to achieve the best outcome at the application stage. It also confirms this later policy is a greater specification and a preferred option, so it can be supplemented much further by having a GI Strategy. So you are saying to me there will be a GI Strategy in the evidence base of the section 19 Consultation?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Essentially yes. There will be a GBI SPD and the timetable for reaching that is in the local development schedule.

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

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| Item (H) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:

“Please would the Council explain why the footpath opposite the Skyllings turning on the London Road (RG142BA) has been left uncompleted for over 4 years now?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Mr Pearce, thank you for your question.

Completion of the footway/cycleway footpath has been delayed due to land ownership issues.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Can you give some more explanation as to what the issues are or would you like me to give you more information?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Not without speaking to you by the sound of it. If you would like me to get more information I'm happy to speak to Officers and get that sent to you.

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

Item (I)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation by Paula Saunderson:

“Agenda item 6– Enviro Strategy Progress report - has items relating to the NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, and Item 11 – Grounds Maintenance Contract - specifically relates to the detailed management of Nature-based Lands under the control of WBC Countryside, so assuming WBC IS classified as a NATURAL SOLUTIONS LANDLORD (mentioned under Item 6), how far has WBC Countryside got with evaluating each piece of land it owns or manages with the aim of increasing Habitats for wild flora and fauna, and achieving a Biodiversity Net Gain on each piece?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

The council owns and manages many 100's of individual pieces of open space of various sizes and social functions, some supporting nature, others valued for their recreational potential. The Countryside Service has placed the management of its most important nature reserves and conservation sites under the stewardship of BBOWT, the local wildlife trust, who continue to improve habitats for flora and fauna. Further, our road verge network provides significant opportunities for biodiversity net gain and currently WBC is funding a project with BBOWT to carry out wildflower surveys of its entire road network. In addition we will be undertaking a Green Blue Infrastructure (GBI) strategy. This is at a very early stage but our vision for the strategy is to develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring West Berkshire is a great place to live, work, and visit.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“I'd just like to say that from a local level, in Clay Hill there are three pieces of quite substantial land that could easily have the opportunity for biodiversity on them. If I could be involved in looking at that I would be most grateful”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

Certainly Ms Saunderson. I will make sure that you are engaged with this when Officers turn to that piece of land.

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

tem (J)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(J) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Alan Pearce:

“Please would the Council confirm that the London Road Industrial Estate cannot be redeveloped on a plot-by-plot basis as no individual planning application can be approved to comply with common drainage law unless the current Faraday Road Football Ground is incorporated in a holistic drainage system for the area. This system would incorporate hard top drainage crates covered over with artificial turf to store the high volumes of urban runoff needed to comply with common drainage law as the water table on the estate is so high?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

Mr Pearce, thank you for your question.

Any land can be redeveloped on a plot by plot basis provided it has the permission of the land owner a valid planning permission and complies with common drainage law.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Are you not in the position now on the London Road Industrial Estate that you can't meet common drainage law unless you use a holistic strategy for the drainage, and any plot by plot application will fail as with Newspaper House?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

I sit here as the Portfolio Holder for Planning and a member of the planning committees and we have had no planning application to review to put any of that to the test at this stage. I would have to stick to the original answer I gave you and say when the application comes forward that is the test that we will apply.

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(A) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“Why do residents have to pre-register for WBC webinars?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

Webinars provide a valuable opportunity for us to engage with residents on specific issues which are important to them. It provides a chance for us to answer their questions, hear their ideas and better understand their views.

Registration provides a number of benefits to help us run effective events. It allows us to gauge interest in the event and possibly the interest of potential attendees. It means we can decide how best to facilitate it based on the number of attendees, how many questions we may receive and the topics we anticipate people will be interested in.

Other advantages include being able to communicate with attendees should the meeting details change, to ensure a recording is sent to anyone who is unable to attend on the day and should we need to follow up on particular issues raised during the event.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by Councillor Carlyne Culver:

“What plans does the council have to raise awareness among voters of the need to possess an acceptable form of ID in readiness for next May's election?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

The Electoral Commission have set out their plans for informing the public about Voter ID. A public awareness campaign will launch in January 2023 using advertising, partnership work, press activity, organic digital engagement and the Commissions website. They intend to produce a range of resources including leaflets, posters, digital resources and press releases. Our communications team will use these to inform the West Berkshire residents.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Carlyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“I've seen the long list of the types of ID that people will be able to present when they come to vote and I note that there aren't many options on there for young people, so if they don't have a passport or driving licence, for example, there are few ways for them to prove their ID. Is there any way that Council can lobby government to try and ensure that there are mechanisms that young people can use to ensure that they can vote?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

It's my understanding that anyone without a valid form of identification will be able to apply for a new free voter card with the local authority including here in West Berkshire. The Elections Act does make it clear that local authorities will be required to provide an identity card to anyone that needs it and the Cabinet Office will be covering the cost of implementing this. You have specifically mentioned younger people, and it is my understanding that currently about 99% of 18-29 year olds do hold relevant identification. 98% of those are aged 17 or over. I think generally 98% of the electorate do currently hold a valid form of identification. Hopefully with all that in place there will be no disenfranchisement of anyone of any age at all.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor Gareth Hurley:

"In these changing times, our children and young people face difficulties and challenges of many kinds. What is the Council doing to help them?"

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

Thank you for your question Cllr Hurley. You are right that our children and young people face many challenges and we provide a range of services to support them. Our Educational Psychology Service (EPS) focusses on emotional well-being and positive outcomes for children, young people and families. Each school has a link educational psychologist who advises schools and works with children and young people. Our Emotional Health Academy (EHA) works alongside the MHST (Mental Health Support Teams), to bring a holistic approach to children's mental health at school. EHA hold a weekly triage where parents, schools and pupils themselves can make referrals to receive help.

The quality and effectiveness of the work done by our ESP has been recognized by the NHS in their funding of two MHSTs in West Berkshire who work in partnership with schools to provide evidence-based interventions to children and young people who experience mental health difficulties.

Another source of support is our Family Hub network. The Hubs work with the whole family to secure strong parenting approaches and to support family relationships. They work closely with schools and have developed various short interventions to support the self-esteem of young people. Secondary schools work alongside an experienced family support worker to deliver a short programme to help young people begin to manage their own needs and feelings.

We also work with providers in the voluntary and community sector to support children and young people through access to youth services. Our model of youth service support has evolved well over recent years and our partnerships ensure a range of options are available which meet local needs.

Last year West Berkshire Council provided £250,000 of funding to support the development of the Waterside Centre which is proving to be a very valuable resource for young people in Newbury and the surrounding area. As part of the Supporting Families Programme, Berkshire Youth have been funded to put two days a week of youth worker time in each Secondary School in West Berkshire providing one to one mentoring support to vulnerable pupils. Different parts of the Local Authority are working in partnership with the voluntary sector to engage with young people and divert them from anti-social behaviour into positive activities and to develop positive relationships with a trusted adult.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation by Councillor Tony Vickers:

“What if any powers does this Council have to control persistent light pollution from sources in the countryside?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

Cllr Vickers, thank you for your question. With respect to nuisance, in some cases the Environmental Protection Act 1990 applies. Councils must investigate complaints about artificial light from premises if the light could be classed as a ‘statutory nuisance’ under the Act, i.e. the light unreasonably and substantially interferes with the use or enjoyment of a home or other premises, or injures health or is likely to injure health. It should be noted that within the Planning Service powers exist to reduce the impact of lighting from developments which have a detrimental impact on local ecology, specifically bats.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

“Naturally, as I have an urban ward that I represent I haven’t received a complaint about this. However I did recently receive one from Kintbury and it interested me and I couldn’t find anything on the Council Website referring to our powers. Can we please have some better information about what we can do about light pollution on our website?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

I’m sure that can be arranged and I’ll ask relevant Officers to put that in place.

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

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| Item (E) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Can the Portfolio holder detail the legal grounds under which the Council can see the former football ground as part of the LRIE, given the land is still classed as a football ground and an asset of community value?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Can I refer you to the West Berkshire Website (<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/lrie>), and specifically the FAQ section.

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

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| Item (F) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Exactly how is the council going to achieve the change of status of the Faraday Road football ground to one where it serves another purpose connected to the LRIE?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Can I refer you to the West Berkshire Website (<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/lrie>), and specifically the FAQ section.



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

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| Item (H) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“How is West Berkshire Council going to encourage use of its kerb side charging points along West Mills Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

Cllr Abbs, thank you for your question.

The Council is looking to add ‘electric vehicle only’ parking restrictions next to existing on street charge points. Unfortunately a lack of available expertise and resource has impacted officers’ ability to progress this, but the West Mills charge points will be looked at as part of this initiative.



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

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| Item (I) | Executive Meeting on 3 November 2022 |
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(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“As it has declared a climate emergency, has WBC performed a recent review of the energy consumption across its properties to see where energy savings can be made?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

Cllr Abbs, thank you for your question.

The Council looks at energy consumption of its assets as part of the annual review of the Environment Strategy. This in turn informs the Council's Capital investment and maintenance programmes.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Abbs asked the following supplementary question:

“I was thinking about Shaw House specifically and what energy reduction techniques we were thinking of applying there, if any?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

I will get back to you on that.
