

Questions and Answers

Council
Thursday 1 December 2022

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

Public Questions to the Council

1 December 2022

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(A) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Simon Pike:

“What were the conclusions and recommendations of the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for North East Thatcham, commissioned by the Council in relation to the Local Plan Review?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

The landscape could accommodate areas of new development in some parts. In short, however, what I would advise is to look at our website under <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence> under Landscape and the full answer is provided there for you.

Simon Pike asked the following supplementary question:

“So at the time I raised the question, the only document that I knew about was referenced in a Council paper dated December 2020. But the document that's now on the website is dated September 2021. So could you explain to me why the Council needed to commission a second landscape capacity assessment for the same topic? And will the Council publish the earlier paper as well? Thank you”.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

I'm not sure I can give you an answer in full other than that anything Local Plan-related is an evolving process which has been going on for a number of years. As I said, the full details are on the website. I'm happy to receive anything from you independently if you wish to point something out specific. Thank you.

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(C) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Anthony King:

“The B4000/Ermin Street in the Woodlands area of Lambourn and Shefford is experiencing a significant growth in traffic, particularly HGV’s. It is basically a country lane used as the primary access to Membury Industrial Area.

There have been a growing number of incidents, including on the 7th and 16th November, in the same location, when 5 vehicles were written off, including 2 HGV’s, and a property nearly demolished. The Emergency Services had significant resources at both including the Air Ambulance.

These happened with current traffic volumes which will grow exponentially when recent approvals for Walkers, Putnams, Gearshifters and the continuing uncontrolled business operations generate huge volumes of additional vehicles from Membury.

Are the council aware that your recent planning decisions and lack of control at Membury, will lead to fatalities on this road and impact the lives of all residents, other road users and your own Environmental targets?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside responded in writing following the meeting:

Each planning application is determined on its merits and assessed against the development plan. The impact of additional traffic movements arising from any proposed development is assessed by the Local Highway Authority, who are a consultee to such applications.

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(E) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Sam Coppinger:

“In light of the fact that very tall distribution HGVs are frequently seen travelling in the middle of the B4000 and following an increase in serious accidents that have caused long road closures, can the council confirm that they will no longer be seeking further B8 development at Membury as the local, rural road network is unsuitable for such vehicles and road closures have a detrimental impact on the local economy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

I'm aware of a Judicial Review process on this so I'm afraid the answer is very short, and that answer is no.

Sam Coppinger asked the following supplementary question:

“Would you agree with me that V8 use is not the type of development that is required at Membury? That small to medium units for local rural employment would be more appropriate?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

I would have to say on the basis again of the Judicial Review, it would be unwise of me to offer a particular view on that one way or the other I'm afraid.

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(H) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Sam Coppinger:

“Why is the council continuing to allow development on the Membury Industrial Estate (MIE) without a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) when there may be a requirement to develop a site in a certain way, for instance, to comply with common drainage law, increase water quality and bio-diversity and to produce a positive contribution to the district's carbon neutral aspirations?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan as they do not form part of the development plan. They cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. The proposed policies in the Local Plan review negate the need for an SPD.

Sam Coppinger asked the following supplementary question:

“Would you agree with me that if we had an SPD, we would have a better interpretation of what CS9 is trying to achieve, rather than the uncontrolled development that is taking place?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

Again I'm afraid, respectfully, I would have to say that with the previous answer I've given that there is policy and detail laid down that means I can't either agree or disagree with you. What we follow is what we follow.

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(N) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

“Under Agenda Item 18 – Local Plan Review - In the Papers for Approval to go out to a Section 19 Consultation I cannot see the Schedule for physical Public Exhibitions that will be held in local halls in the locations that have big impacts, so when will this be published pleased, and how will these important events be advertised?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

You are correct, there are no big public exhibitions planned. The Regulation 19 is a formal stage. We are currently consulting in accordance with our Statement Community Involvement which is available on our website.

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“I'm very disappointed with that answer because Section 18 took place during Covid and we couldn't have any public exhibitions. I've done some research and the responses to Section 18 were not as high as in other LPAs of similar size, so I really would urge you to rethink that policy. And please provide some public exhibitions in key locations which have massive impacts”.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you. I note that request and I'm happy to speak to officers. I think what we've had as a situation, which is demonstrated through Covid, is that the electronic responses that we've received were actually in all honesty higher than we were probably expecting for the Regulation 18. So I'll take on board what you say, we will discuss, but I think for future policies that we would probably look to that position.

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(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Ruth Steedman:

"I very much welcome the new electric charging points in Newbury and Hungerford. What plans are there to extend this rollout beyond these towns to West Berkshire villages?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

To date we have primarily concentrated the provision of EV charging points in Council controlled car parks and on residential streets with no off street parking and these locations will remain a priority going forward. Indeed there is funding in the capital programme for the coming years to roll out further charge points in similar locations. To date we have provided 35 on street charge points in residential areas and 14 charge points in our public car parks.

I would note that the Council is not the only provider of EV charging though. The infrastructure can also be looked at through market options to fill gaps in infrastructure where it is viable to do so.

Ruth Steedman asked the following supplementary question:

"Many of the on road charging points, particularly in Hungerford, anyone can park there. So you roll up, you need to charge your car, and you can't because someone who doesn't even have an electric car is parked there. Are there any plans to actually create a bay such that that doesn't happen?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

We have had discussion and review for a little while. We are looking at how we can approach that. In certain locations it may be more favourable than others, but certainly it's something that isn't completely off the table. At this stage we haven't reached that point of being able to do so.

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(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Graham Storey:

“Is the council confident that all social housing within West Berkshire meets the Decent Homes Standard to avoid the health of tenants suffering due to poor quality accommodation?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The answer is yes. This is a requirement for all registered providers and they are monitored by the returns to the Regulator for Social Housing.

Graham Storey asked the following supplementary question:

“You say you’re confident but the audit review or question is because there has been a number of complaints recently in the press indicating that some of the social housing locally may not be up to standard”.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

I think you may be referring to an article in the Newbury Weekly News last week. I did actually make personal enquiries of Sovereign, who are the registered provider in that case, who ensured that this work is all now being completed.

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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paul Morgan:

“Can the Council please provide a copy of the written brief / terms of reference, timescales and fees agreed with Hemingway Design for their engagement / involvement with the London Road Industrial Estate Project Refresh?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Yes, this information was published on Contracts Finder on 12th September. We can email you a link to that along with the project scope and timescales.

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“Does that include how much the Council is paying for this consultancy work as well? When will I get that?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Yes it does and as soon as we can e-mail you the link. I would imagine it'll be done tomorrow.



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(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation by Vaughan Miller:

“Does the Council have a roadmap for improvements to its kerbside recycling collections. In particular, when does it plan to join the numerous other councils who collect all plastic and metal cartons and not just plastic bottles?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

The Council is committed to achieving continuous improvement in environmental stewardship. We have been making positive changes to both the kerbside and non-kerbside recycling services. As I'm sure you're aware our new separate food waste collections will help the Council to significantly improve it and the districts recycling performance. We have also been expanding our network of mini-recycling centres, with the latest additions located in Theale and East Garston, and we're shortly planning for a new third facility in the Tilehurst area. Our existing collection approach is based on achieving a greater quality (and not just quantity) of recycling. The non-kerbside recycling facilities are intended to complement the kerbside collection service and a wider range of plastics for example can be sent to the non-kerbside facilities.

A detailed roadmap for recycling improvements will be captured as part of our emerging work on a replacement Waste and Resources Strategy for West Berkshire, which will be developed and published by the end of 2023. Our strategy will reflect local resource management priorities, and will also be informed by national policy and legislative drivers.

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for that update. I believe our good neighbours in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse were in the top two and four respectively in the whole country in 2020/21. West Berkshire were 89th. Those were the latest numbers I could find. Do you consider that is good enough considering you were one of the first Councils to declare a climate emergency?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation answered:

I think no Council would consider anything good enough. We were all on a journey here. They started on a much wider scheme of recycling long before climate declarations were made. Yes, they collect a single bin, which may be the purpose of your question, but we have a different situation and different setting hence our separate kerbside collection. In summary, we are constantly striving to improve our and the districts recycling performance.

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(J) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“Councillor Somner stated (03/11/2022 exec meeting) that there have been no planning applications on the LRIE to test the theory that the plot by plot planning can or cannot meet common drainage law. Is this not a criminal waste of taxpayers money to have already spent thousands without even checking whether their plans are even possible?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The answer to your question is no.

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“The London Road Industrial Estate has been rolling on for near on 20 years now and there's no planning application yet. You've said we're going to do this, we're going to do that, we're doing everything else - isn't that predetermination?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

No.

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(L) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Sam Coppinger:

“Why is the council continuing to allow development on the Membury Industrial Estate (MIE) without a Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) when there may be a requirement to develop a site in a certain way, for instance, to comply with common drainage law, increase water quality and bio-diversity and to produce a positive contribution to the district's carbon neutral aspirations?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

Each planning application is determined on its merits and assessed against the development plan. The impact on surface water of any proposed development is assessed by the Lead Local Flood Authority, who are a consultee to such applications. Their assessment is also informed by material considerations such as the Council's adopted Sustainable Drainage SPD.

Sam Coppinger asked the following supplementary question:

“So after the OSMC meeting (Item 12, Appendix B) my understanding is that the surface water strategy for Membury Industrial Estate is to use third party land on the other side of the public highway. Does the Member not agree that, in accordance with the sustainable drainage SPD vision, surface water runoff should be managed as close to the source as possible, just as should be happening on the London Road Industrial Estate?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside undertook to provide a response in writing subsequent to the meeting.

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(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paul Morgan:

“It was recently reported in the NWN that “There is a £15.8m hole in West Berkshire Council’s budget forecast and that Council officers have been instructed to find additional savings of £9.2m”. Can the Council please confirm whether this is in fact the case and what root and branch review process has now been initiated (and by whom) to find the additional savings required?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I can confirm that this is the *revenue* budget gap as at the start of November. The Government has subsequently announced at the Autumn Statement, on the 17th November, a variety of measures to provide additional funding to support to Local Councils. This includes:

- An additional £2.8 billion of funding available for social care in 2023/24, increasing to £4.7 billion in 2024/25. This includes £1 billion of new grant funding next year for social care – increasing to £1.7 billion from 2024/25. This includes funding via DLUHC and DHSC.
- Delaying the planned adult social care charging reforms from October 2023 – October 2025, but the funding intended for implementation will be retained in local authority budgets to help them meet current pressures.
- Further council tax flexibilities, including increasing the core referendum limit for increases in council tax to 3% per year from 2023/24. In addition, councils with social care responsibilities will be able to increase the adult social care precept by up to 2% per year. This will make available an anticipated additional £1.8 billion to local authorities over the next two years, if councils make use of the flexibilities available (5% total per annum).
- From 1 April 2023, a revaluation will update rateable values for non-domestic properties in England and the multiplier in line with evidence from April 2021.
 - The Autumn Statement announced a £13.6 billion support package to protect ratepayers facing increase. This includes a freezing of the Business Rates multipliers for 23/24, a Transitional Relief scheme to limit the rate at which bills can increase, a more generous Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief, and the Supporting Small Business scheme to cap bill increases for business that lose relief due to the revaluation.
 - Local authorities will be fully compensated for any loss of income as a result of these business rates measures and will receive new burdens funding for administrative and IT costs.

We await the Local Government finance settlement in December to provide the actual figures for West Berkshire Council, and we anticipate that this will reduce the further savings required.

We are conducting a further review of savings to close the gap for the year ahead per the Executive report and I have requested, with the Executive, for a review of our

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options and will work with officers to provide this to us in order to conclude the budget papers for 2023-24 and deliver a balanced budget.

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“There's lots of big numbers that you quoted there, it's quite interesting. So I guess what you're saying, in summary, is that there is a gap but at the moment, all these numbers you quoted, you don't know how big that gap is. So what projects are you looking at specifically to close the potential gap?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

For the first part I wouldn't agree. We do know how big the gap is and I was outlining both central government measures and actions taken locally in order to close that gap. So we are aware of that. And you refer to projects. I'm not sure I would be able to name you individual projects that we are discontinuing or cutting, and in fact, it's the intention of this administration to ensure that next year's budget contains no cuts to frontline services.



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(K) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Why does this Conservative administration have such a limited ambition for Newbury Football Club that it is planning to build a stadium that is too small to allow the club to grow beyond Step 4, which is 4 levels below the National League?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

It is not for the Council to have ambition for Newbury FC but themselves. Newbury Football Club is currently playing matches in Tier 7 Division 2 of the Hellenic League and WBC Officers are in regular dialogue with representatives of the club who are very happy with the planned Step 4 provision that we will be providing at the Newbury Sports Hub. It will take several promotions for the club to achieve the Step 4 level. Sadly a few people who are obsessed with football being played at Faraday Road, egged on by the Liberal Democrats, have delayed the project, denying our residents this fantastic new sports facility which otherwise would be open for the next season and causing increased costs to Council Taxpayers. It is really disappointing.

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Unlike you, the conservative led Mole Valley District Council decided back in 2013 to redevelop the football ground in Dorking. Consequently to moving into the new ground, Dorking Wanderers went up the steps and are now in the National League. This is a town the size of Hungerford. It is a great story. Why on earth would you plan to remove any chance of that happening for Newbury?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

I don't think I can really comment on what happened at Dorking Town.

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(O) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Sam Coppinger:

“Can the council explain why there no Site Selection Background Paper Appendix for Lambourn & Membury, when Lambourn is designated under Spatial Policy 3 as a RURAL SERVICE CENTRE, and all the other RSCs and smaller SERVICE VILLAGES have them – like Chieveley & Great Shefford?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Lambourn is undertaking a Neighbourhood Development Plan and therefore they are responsible for allocating new housing in the parish. This means that there is no need for a site selection paper from the Council.

Sam Coppinger asked the following supplementary question:

“Without the site selection paper would you not agree that it will be very difficult for the public to comment? Or would it not be better to hold the local plan until that's been addressed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

I would say if they are doing a Neighbourhood Development Plan, as with others, it will go out to full consultation at referendum to the people that are relevant in that area and it would be at that point that any outcomes will be established.

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(M) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Does this Conservative administration feel that spending £4.5M and over £10M respectively on the Lido and the Sports Hub is a good use of tax payers money when it is expected that the council will need to find upwards of £15M of cuts next year?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Quite understandably you do not understand the way West Berkshire Council finances work. There is a complete separation between the Capital Account and the Revenue Account. The £15 Million potential shortfall that you refer to is the Revenue Account as has been outlined by Cllr Mackinnon. He's explained the way that hopefully will be controlled over the next few months. I can assure you that this administration will continue its prudent financial approach whilst delivering services to our residents, as evidenced by the recent independent survey of 304 England & Wales Local Authorities where we were ranked 8th on our financial record and 1st for overall service delivery.

The costs of our investment in Leisure Provision are spread over 40 years not a single year so it is not remotely comparable. They come out of the Capital account and are funded by Government Loans at a concessionary interest rate and include capital repayment over that period.

The investment in the lido is required to ensure its provision for future generations and the public consultation conducted between July and September 2021 revealed 95% support for investment in it.

The historic operation of 10 weeks opening in the summer period is costly and inefficient. The new lido will be open to the public for 6 months each year. The new 50m pool requires less water than the existing 74m lido and will be far more energy efficient. The overall scheme provides a significantly enhanced offer for families including interactive water features for children.

The investment in the Northcroft Leisure Centre, programmed for 2024/5, will see an expansion of the health and fitness offer with a larger gym and more dance and exercise studios which will increase income generation and lower operational costs. A review of the energy systems will also be incorporated to maximise green energy. Without this investment leisure provision will be more expensive not less and therefore this investment is completely rational in the light of existing economic circumstances.

In relation to the Sports Hub costs have risen in large part due to delays caused by the impending Judicial Review. Nevertheless, the Sports Hub will provide vital new facilities to support the development of both football and rugby and address the significant under provision of sports pitches that exist across West Berkshire.

So the answer to your question is yes, this administration does.

Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Whilst the Lib Dems fully support improvements to the lido, and also the objective of reducing the shortage of 3G pitches in West Berkshire, it's hard to believe that a

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modernised lido facility cannot be achieved for far less than four and a half million. And I can't understand the huge cost of the planned sports hub, which is really not a fit for purpose replacement for the Faraday Road stadium. What do you say to those who believe that these two projects are evidence of your failure to provide value for money to the taxpayers of West Berkshire?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

I would totally reject it. The lido is a far more complex refurbishment than you possibly imagine. The back of the Lido pool was broken and the costs just for that are very significant. In terms of the sports hub we are producing a state-of-the-art scheme, which is good value for money.



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1 December 2022

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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by Councillor Jeremy Cottam:

“In light of the recent dramatic climate events, has West Berkshire Council's risk register been reviewed recently to ensure that the environmental causes of risk are suitably understood and represented, and that the associated mitigating actions are in place?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

Yes, all risk registers have been recently reviewed. In accordance with the Council's Risk Management Policy, risks are identified and managed on an ongoing basis, taking into consideration all causes of risks linked to the Council's objectives, and are formally reported as part of updated risk registers on a quarterly basis. With regards to your specific comments about managing the impacts of climate events, the Council has declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. The mitigation actions are coordinated through our Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030 and regular updates are reported about the delivery of this strategy. Any overarching risk linked to the strategy is recorded on the Environment Department's Service Risk Register and this risk is also escalated on the Place Directorate's Risk Register. Other environmental risks are managed by the Council's services.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam asked the following supplementary question:

“I have to admit this was a question prompted by a parish councillor at a Governance and Ethics meeting asking if this Council was making sure it's very aware of, for example, torrential rain and drought, and the consequences of these on the environment and community. What about identifying those type of issues and bringing them forward in the risk register, not when they happen, but try maybe? We do monitor certain things within Governance and Ethics, could we maybe add that to the list of things for consideration, giving it a priority and an importance, making it equal to all the other risks that this Council and this community is subject to?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

It is my understanding that officers are involved and note comments made at Governance and Ethics meetings. I know there are different comments made about specific risks regularly, for example Councillor Abbs raised a lot of Covid related risks during the pandemic. However, if there are any specific risks you feel that are not being addressed, or that anyone feels are not being addressed, feel free to e-mail them to me, and I'm happy to discuss them with relevant officers.

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(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“What are the Council's plans for filling the gaps in the provision of defibrillators across West Berkshire?”

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing answered:

Thank you for your question and, as you will know, the question of defibrillator provision was the subject of a report to the Health and Wellbeing Board in May. I've looked at what the recommendations in that report were and what's happened since.

To identify those various actions:

- a) reminding Members that they are able to use their Members' Community bids to propose funding defibrillators – indeed there have been five such bids so far during the term of this council – you (Cllr Abbs) in 2019/20, none in 2020/21, Cllrs Hooker & Mackinnon in 2021/22, Cllrs Pask & Doherty in the earlier 2022/23 round, and there's another one in this latest round, but that bid is yet to be considered and is confidential at the moment.
- b) signposting town and parish council to various sources of funding for public access defibrillators;
- c) reminding town and parish councils of the need to undertake regular maintenance checks of defibrillators, and indeed of the pads and everything else;
- d) because this was a question that was raised in the report and indeed raised at Health and Wellbeing, confirming that First Aid training, including information on defibrillator use, is provided in schools as part of the curriculum; and
- f) encouraging residents to download the 'Save a Life' app as part of a publicity campaign to support British Heart Week in June - this shows the locations of all publicly accessible defibrillators and has a whole load of other stuff about health and how to use a defibrillator, what to do in emergency and indeed has a 999 button. I'd also point any Members who are interested to the defibfinder.uk website, which is based on the same information but is an easier way of targeting rather than through an app if you're looking at a PC.

So, in terms of gaps in provision, fundamentally the Health and Wellbeing Board agreed that the best place for this conversation is with the town and parish councils working in conjunction with local communities to see where they are best placed to identify gaps in provision.

I am pleased to note that, since the report, of the more rural areas of the District, And I am indeed pleased that since the report rural areas in the district are coming forward, because that was one of the things that the report identified - that we've got a reasonable provision in urban areas but there are some gaps in rurality. Upper Basildon has identified a defibrillator location and a Lower Basildon Parish Report indicates that one will be installed there once a suitable site is found.

I would also encourage Members to support their communities in this regard. Where defibrillators are installed we also encourage everyone to ensure they are registered

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and advertised so that the community knows where they are without having to go on an app. You should know where in your community the defibrillator is.

Councillor Adrian Abbs asked the following supplementary question:

"It's good to know there's some activity going on and I think you're saying that basically the plans for filling the gaps are really to push it out to parish councils and so on, which I don't disagree with. My only question would be how have we thought about the type of tools that are actually going to be needed to be able to do that? I mean, it's great at one level, but it's far easier if you actually take the position of all the existing ones, plop some rings around them, and that will identify where the gaps are straight away. And therefore we can go to the parishes saying actually, do you realise you've got this gap? We can work on the funding later, but its knowledge of where the gaps are. Because it's no good me having the app in my hand when I press the button and actually there's not one near me. So are we doing some tool availability, or something to help them with that process of finding the gaps?"

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing answered:

If you read the report, you'll see that a number of rural locations were identified as having a gap, and then there's been engagement. I didn't ask officers the specific question of what communication did you have with those parishes because they're basically parishes in the rural area, but I'm happy to take that away.

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(C) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Councillor Lee Dillon:

"If the members of this Administration are so committed to their vision for London Road, why haven't they put it in the Local Plan?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

LRIE is included in the proposed Submission Version Local Plan Review, now approved policies SP1, SP3, SP20, DM32 and Table 18 of Appendix 4 "Designate Employment Areas".

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(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Councillor Phil Barnett:

“When Members consider planning applications where working hours on a construction site is an important consideration in their deliberations on said applications, can the portfolio holder identify why contractors on so many recent Western Area approvals have deliberately over-ridden these conditions to suit their own schedules, affecting many residents in the surrounding roads?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

I cannot speak for developers' actions, but where there is a suspected breach of any planning condition it can be reported to the Planning Enforcement Team for investigation. I know you attended the planning enforcement training just the other day. Where a breach is identified the team will take appropriate action. Often these matters are resolved amicably through communications with the developer concerned.

Councillor Phil Barnett asked the following supplementary question:

“I think the sad thing about it is that it's happening time and time again. The Carnival at the Racecourse is a good example of continually flouting the conditions that were imposed on them. Even the application that I mentioned earlier on tonight in Pinchington Lane, and Sterling Cables in Kings Road. It's sad, but it's happening. Residents report it, I report it, and no action is taken on these developers or these agents. It's going to keep happening.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

All I can say is that from the training you attended you know the changes that have been put through the plan that is now on the website. I won't deny that enforcement has been an area of concern for a good while, but it is something that we are dedicated to addressing. We've got three officers at the moment that are doing a sterling job. They have a large area to cover and we are relying on information coming in. When we get that information we need to act on it. I take your point.

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(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Carlyne Culver:

“In the light of pressure on the council’s budget from inflation and real terms cuts, will the leader give an undertaking that the ruling group will work cooperatively with opposition members when setting the next budget to protect council services, particularly those affecting the most vulnerable residents in the district?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I'm sure you're very aware that the Council Strategy currently has a priority to actually make sure that we are looking at our most vulnerable in the community, making sure they get better outcomes. So it's an ongoing piece of work of this Council to make sure that those most vulnerable in our district get the support they need, and in particular when we're looking at budget setting. Of course we are looking at protecting frontline services and I think Councillor Mackinnon has made no secret of the fact that when we're looking at our budget setting, and I've made no secret of the fact it's going to be difficult, we will look to protect frontline services first and foremost and look at what efficiencies we can do in the back office before we look to the front office. With regards to your particular request around co-operation with the budget setting, I've actually heard on a number of occasions the Portfolio Holder for Finance say if you want to engage with him, he's very open to having that conversation, and he's very happy to have conversations with anybody that wants to influence the budget. There is an element whereby we do have to recognise that there are pressure bids. There are ways that we put different things into the budget which require a proper business case and effective scrutiny, so we can look at how they sit within the overall budget as a whole rather than a three day notice amendment, whereby we've already been looking at how to spend the £154m that we're going to have to spend and that really makes it very difficult. So the Portfolio Holder is very open and has given me his commitment if there are specifics that you want to work on with this in mind, to sit down and have that conversation and see where we can go with it.

Councillor Carlyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“This year we put forward one capital amendment and one revenue amendment. We put forward one of each this time because we didn't want to take up lots of time because the previous time had everything bundled together and there was an excuse not to vote for it on that basis. So we tried a different tactic. We have worked with the Director of Finance before ahead of budgets to find out what our various options are. So I welcome your commitment to talking to us. It is possible that we will have a different leadership next year or even no overall control. So does the Leader commit to working jointly between all the parties and with the Director of Finance well ahead of May to look at all of our options and think about what we need to do?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

We are already doing the budget build now. We set our budget in March, not May, and so the budget for the forthcoming year will already be set. So that process is already in play. I know the Section 151 Officer is always available for a briefing. We won't know

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probably until the 21 December what our final settlement will be, which is when we'll have an indication of the tweaks and everything else that we may or not may not be able to do. But come that period of time, we'll be looking between the settlement coming in and the budget setting. And as I said, if there is something specific and the Portfolio Holder for Finance is committed to sit down with anybody that wants to sit down with him and have those conversations, so that we can see if there's something that can be worked in. It will go through the process that any investment would go through within this Council, which is around a business case submission.

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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Steve Masters:

“With the increasing pressure on mortgage payers and private landlords increasing rents is the council confident that it has enough emergency accommodation for individuals and families who may become homeless in the coming months?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Sadly, there is a shortage of emergency accommodation right across the UK and this is also the case in this district. I share your concerns completely and the administration and the officers are actively working on schemes to increase the supply of accommodation for families who may become homeless in the coming months.

Councillor Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“At the moment, as you allude, we are short of emergency accommodation and we have a substantial number of individuals and families residing in hotels. While that sounds great on one level, it's quite disruptive. As you know, families can be moved within a week to another hotel in another venue. Can you assure this Council and the residents that you will be doing everything within your power to make sure that no families are in hotels, especially with children, over the Christmas period?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Unfortunately, all of the Council's temporary accommodation stock is currently occupied, and as a result a very few households are placed in hotel accommodation for a very short period until the Council's temporary accommodation becomes available. The Housing Team are excelling themselves in trying to find solutions to these problems and I can't congratulate them enough for what they're trying to do.

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(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“What is the Current Typology (Categorisation) of the Old Football Ground Grass Pitch at the Southern end of Faraday Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

The current typology or categorisation of the old football ground grass pitch at the southern end of Faraday Road differs according to the context. For example, it is included in the Brownfield Land Register for reasons which I will come to in my response to your later question. However, it is excluded from the LRIE Protected Employment Area as set out in the Core Strategy and the draft Local Plan Review Presubmission version before us this evening. In the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, the whole of LRIE is categorised as having development potential but with the caveat that it would result in the loss of a football ground.

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(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

“When will the recruitment freeze in planning be lifted?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

I can confirm that the Council is currently seeking to recruit to a number of posts in the Development Management Team in order to remove some of the temporary posts that we have, including enforcement. The Council took the decision to put a temporary freeze on all non-essential recruitment, so it is important to note that any essential recruitment in planning can continue to progress.

Councillor Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“It's my understanding that at the moment there are 70 jobs in planning, but there are 20 vacancies. So can you reassure me that those will be opened for people to apply for soon? Can you give me a date when that will be happening?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships undertook to provide a response in writing subsequent to the meeting.

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(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Steve Masters:

“How many major developments, completed since May 2019 have met their affordable housing target – and in particular the 70% social rent target?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

13 out of 13 met the affordable housing target. 6 out of 13 met the 70% social rent target.



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(J) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Why has the Old Football Ground Grass Pitch at the Southern end of Faraday Road been or was it included in the Brownfield site BR/201729 when the NPPF Criteria for Brownfield and your web site specifically excludes Recreation Grounds?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

This is the answer that I referred to a moment ago. I can confirm that the Old Football Ground Grass Pitch at Faraday Road was included in the brownfield site BR/201729 on the West Berkshire Council brownfield land register. The site was first identified as brownfield in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, with the caveat that the football pitch itself was green infrastructure. This was then carried forward into the brownfield land register which was prepared in 2017 in response to a Government requirement and in line with the version of the NPPF which was current at the time. The brownfield land register is being updated to reflect changes made to the NPPF since 2017.

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(K) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Steve Masters:

“What are the current numbers on the housing register?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The answer is there's 901 Active households (as at 23/11/22).

Councillor Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“What moves are the Housing Team doing to increase the emergency stocks and get people off the housing register, etc?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

I know you work closely with the Housing Team, so you will know they are, as I mentioned in the previous answer, they're working seriously hard trying to find solutions. It is a concern that the numbers on the housing ratio have been going up which I suppose you probably expect in the current environment, so to a degree it's a moving target. But we will do our very best to do what we can.
