

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 12th January, 2023**

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

Item (A)

Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023

### **(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Simon Pike:**

*“The current Local Plan, adopted by the Council in 2012, includes an 'Area Delivery Plan Policy for Thatcham'. This states, inter alia, that the town centre will be regenerated with the redevelopment of the Kingsland Centre driving this improvement, that Thatcham's services and facilities will be improved, and that the range of leisure facilities within Thatcham will be expanded. What aspects of these objectives has the Council delivered to date, and what more does it expect to deliver in the remainder of the plan period?”*

### **The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:**

Thank you for your question.

Back in 2010, the owners of the Kingsland Centre had stated that they would redevelop the facility, however since then the economic situation has changed and this project has not progressed. We understand that refurbishment proposals have been discussed with Thatcham Town Council and we look forward to hearing more about these during the development of the Town Centre Strategy for Thatcham.

With regards to the range of leisure facilities available within Thatcham, this Council has invested as follows

- Henwick Sports Pavilion over £75,000
- Thatcham Library - New Build Build a new and larger library in Thatcham as outlined in the council's Infrastructure Development Plan (2022-27). £1,200,000
- Thatcham Nature Discovery Completely new interpretation space with exhibits to tell visitors about the fascinating history and wildlife of the Kennet valley, the canal and reed beds £125,000
- Thatcham Memorial Foundation: Jubilee Playground - installation of playground and recreational equipment £75,000.00

As for the future, I would refer you to the Infrastructure Funding Statement, the Leisure Strategy and the Council Strategy all of which are available on line at the Councils web site.

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

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023
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### **(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:**

*“Executive members have often expressed faith in the councils drainage officers. Why are more expensive SUDs Consultants being contracted to advise on the LRIE?”*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

The Council has a role as landowner of the LRIE and also has a role as local planning authority which would hear any planning application bought forward. The Council's drainage officers might be required to comment on such an application and as such that could lead to a perceived conflict of interest if those same officers were to comment on an application, in whose preparation they had been involved.

**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?”*

#### **John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:**

*“There is a pre-supposition by bringing in consultants it is recognised that the drainage is going to cause a lot of problems on LRIE. Using your own figures from the Addison Young Environmental Report, there is a suggestion that 2, 3 or 4 acres will be needed for infrastructure. Where will that come from?”*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

The drainage requirements for any application bought forward will have to be dealt with as part of that application as and when it comes to pass.

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

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Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023

### **(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Alan Pearce:**

*"The Executive decision EX4219 London Road Industrial Estate Project Refresh 6.11 The delivery Strategy is to redevelop the depot site by the end of 2024 and at the same time adopt a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the LRIE. Please would the Council explain the logic in redeveloping the depot site without an SPD, when there may be requirement to redevelop the site in a certain way, for instance to provide a holistic drainage strategy/system for the area to reduce surface water flooding downstream?"*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Any Supplementary Planning Document will be developed in partnership with stakeholders, with adoption by end 2024, subject to statutory planning processes which include the Local Plan Review. There is no reason why planning applications should not come forward on any sites within LRIE before then, since appropriate assessment of flood risk is carried out as part of the statutory planning process by the Local Planning Authority.

**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:**

*"I don't quite understand why you wouldn't do an SPD first as a baseline. Perhaps you could clarify, my understanding is that if you can't develop the London Road on a piecemeal basis it will have to go back to the Executive for a new refresh. Is the refresh policy Council policy at the moment?"*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

I can confirm that the Refresh policy decided in June last year remains current policy. If not possible to develop on a plot-by plot basis, we would need to take advice on what would need to be done as and when it happened, but I wouldn't like to say for now.

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

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Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023

**(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Simon Pike:**

*“What were the costs to the Council and the value of Government grants for the installation, the replacement and the subsequent removal of Orcas along the A4 through Thatcham? Will any of the grant funding now need to be repaid?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:**

The Orcas along the A4 through Thatcham were introduced on a pilot basis in August 2020, using Emergency Active Travel (EATF) funding allocated by the Department for Transport (DfT) during the pandemic. The purpose of this funding was to promote and enable active travel whilst roads were relatively quiet and residents avoided public transport due to the risk of transmission.

The total cost of installation and removal is £61,371. This includes work to refresh the lining along the A4 which is due shortly following on from removal of the Orcas.

As a result of feedback received from road users and concerns in respect of the need for fairly intensive maintenance of the Orcas, the Council made the DfT aware that we were reviewing the future of the Orcas on 11 July 2022, and offered DfT officials the chance to comment.

The DfT raised no objections to the removal of the Orcas and as such we do not anticipate that the grant funding for this pilot scheme will need to be re-paid.”

It is our view that the Orcas served their purpose to visibly promote active travel.

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

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Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023
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**(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by John Gotelee:**

*“Approximately one quarter of 322 English local planning authorities have either adopted or are preparing BNG requirements in their local plans. Is West Berkshire Council one of them?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:**

Thank you for your question.

Yes, the Local Plan Review which is being consulted on at the moment has proposed policy: SP11 Biodiversity and Geodiversity.

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

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Item (H)	Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023
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### **(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Simon Pike:**

*"The Area Delivery Plan Policy for Thatcham states that "The range of leisure facilities within Thatcham will be expanded, utilising those at the existing Newbury Leisure Park on Lower Way". Has the council provided any funding or other support to support this expansion, and what range of leisure opportunities are now available at the Leisure Park?"*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:**

Mr. Pike. Thank you for your question.

The Council has made, and continues to make significant investment into the leisure and cultural facilities in Thatcham. Specifically:-

- *Henwick Sports Pavilion over £75,000. A masterplan exercise will be commissioned to examine ways of getting maximum usage out of the overall site and this Council has already indicated a willingness to provide financial support within its Playing Pitch Strategy.*
- *Thatcham Library – An interim refurbishment including a new entrance and an accessible WC is due to commence imminently at a cost of over £60,000 once a contractor has been appointed. The Thatcham Masterplan, currently underway is expected to include the provision of a new and larger library in Thatcham as outlined in the council's Infrastructure Development Plan (2022-27) at an estimated cost of £1,200,000*
- *Thatcham Nature Discovery has a completely new interpretation space with exhibits to tell visitors about the fascinating history and wildlife of the Kennet valley, the canal and reed beds at a cost of £125,000 from this Council.*
- *Thatcham Memorial Foundation: Jubilee Playground - installation of playground and recreational equipment £75,000*
- *Kennet Leisure Centre has £200,000 allocated from the Capital Budget in 2024/5 for refurbishment works.*

I would stress that Newbury Leisure Park is privately owned and since 2012 has undergone at least one refurbishment but unfortunately due to a variety of reasons including Covid 19, has ceased trading and is currently up for sale by the owners.

During the pandemic the Council provided grant financial support to the occupiers of Newbury Leisure Park under the statutory Covid-19 Local Restrictions Support Grant. These grants were paid to all rate-paying businesses that had been forced to close as



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a result of Government restrictions. However, given financial constraints and extensive other commitments in the Leisure Strategy the Newbury Leisure Park is not something that we could contemplate becoming involved in.

**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:**

*“If it is not appropriate for the Council to provide support to a private business like the Leisure Park why did the Local Plan in 2012 give a commitment effectively that it would be expanded, when it is outside the ability of the Council to achieve that?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:**

I'm afraid I wasn't a Councillor in 2012 and so would like to come back with a written response.

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

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Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023
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**(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Councillor Nassar Hunt:**

*“White lining in Thatcham Broadway has been degraded by time and was reported to the Highways department in early August after complaints from residents at a Thatcham Town Council Surgery. We have finally had a reply from the Highways Department that they are intending to reinstate white lining in key roads across Thatcham including the Broadway but no date for commencement of the works has been provided. Why does the Council not act sooner to re-fresh white lines before they are severely degraded and why does it take so long from this being notified to Highways for such work as this to be carried out?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:**

Dear Councillor Hunt, thank you for your question.

The Council takes a risk-based approach to maintain and inspect road markings on the network in accordance with our Highway Safety Inspection Policy. Works that are considered safety critical are prioritised. Other less critical work is grouped together by location to maximise economy of scale. There also may appear to be a delay in delivery when we move to the wetter months as wet and slippery road conditions are not conducive to laying road markings. This also means it is difficult for officers to provide a date for delivery.

I can however assure you that the works have been ordered and will be delivered early this year, weather permitting.

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

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**Item (B)**

Executive Meeting on 12 January 2023

**(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by Councillor Jeff Brooks:**

*“At the Council meeting held on 1st December 2022, the Leader of the Council informed members that Cllr Rowles was to be replaced on six Council Committees and as a Council representative on the outside body, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel (the TVPCP). It is my understanding that appointments to outside bodies are made (at least) annually and can only change mid-term if the appointed Cllr resigns from the outside body. Did Cllr Docherty have the authority to replace Cllr Rowles on the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel (the TVPCP) or should this have been effected at the Annual Council meeting?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:**

Thank you for your question.

I'm afraid that you are wrong on two counts.

First, Council wasn't informed about the changes, rather **COUNCIL resolved** the changes.

Second, changes to an outside body can certainly be made 'mid-term' as you put it – indeed this is explicitly recognised in the rules of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel, and I quote: “An Authority may decide in accordance with its procedures to remove its Member from the Panel at any time”.

So, to repeat:

- Cllr Docherty didn't replace Cllr Rowles on anything – Council did;
- and
- Council had every authority to do so, mid-term or otherwise.

**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 Jeff Brooks asked the following supplementary question:**

*“You quote from the Thames Valley Police Panel which is a Panel and not a Joint Committee.*

[As a point of order, Councillor Graham Bridgman interjected that the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel was definitely a Joint Committee]

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*That's very helpful. Quoting from the Constitution it states that 'the Executive may establish joint arrangements with one or more local authorities to exercise functions which are Executive functions, except as set out below, the Executive may only appoint Executive Members to a Joint Committee, and those members need not reflect the political composition of the Local Authority. Thames Valley Police terms say it can change a member, but here under the rules for a Joint Committee it says that it should have been an Executive Member. The Executive may appoint Members to a Joint Committee from outside the Executive where the Joint Committee has functions for only part of the area of the Local Authority, and that area is smaller than two fifths of the Authority.' I think you have actually done something that you were not entitled to do."*

**Leader:** "I am taking your supplementary question as 'Have you done something that you were not entitled to do'?"

**The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:**

Based on my conversations with the Monitoring Officer I am confident that all decisions have been lawful.

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