

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 8th June, 2023

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

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Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by Ian Hall:

“Following the judicial review of the re- development of Newspaper House in 2020 that decided an Environmental Impact Assessment was needed , why was one not ordered and paid for by WBC in 2020? Given the importance attached to the redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate , surely one should have been instructed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Good evening Mr Hall. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a statutory process for evaluating and predicting potential environmental impacts on developments that may meet certain thresholds. Proposed developments go through a screening process and where a scheme is regarded as “EIA development” an Environmental Statement (ES) must be prepared by the applicant to accompany the associated planning application. An ES is commissioned and paid for by the developer – however, the Newspaper House site is located on land outside the Council’s ownership.

Your question refers to a judicial review but there was no judicial review of the redevelopment of Newspaper House in 2020. There was a planning appeal decision Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3252212 dated 1 Sept 2020 in which the Inspector agreed with the Local Planning Authority that the NPPF’s flood risk sequential test was applicable and failed. The Inspector issued a separate screening direction to the effect that the Newspaper House development was not Environmental Impact Assessment.

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

Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by John Gotelee:

“The cycle way round St Johns roundabout is highly dangerous and has recently seen a child knocked off his bike. The problem is that motorists give way to the right but then when exiting the roundabout are expected to give way to cyclists on their left. What does the council propose to do to make this roundabout safe for cyclists?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel answered:

Thank you Mr Gotelee.

Unfortunately we cannot comment on the circumstances of individual accidents but colleagues in the Council's Traffic and Road Safety Team will be reviewing the accident report when we receive it from the Police. However, in view of the accident I have asked officers to carry out a review and will work with local groups like Spokes and our own Highways projects team to see what improvements can be made.

As an authority, road safety for all road users is our main concern. We are keen to improve cyclist and other road users experience when using WBC roads. Thank you for raising this publically and we will write to you when we have discussed it with the relevant community groups

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:

“Since I wrote that question, I myself personally have been knocked off a cycle way into the road by a teenager on a bicycle reading his mobile phone as he was going along. The same day I saw a police car attending an emergency trying to wend its way down the now narrowed London Road, clip a kerb and burst a tyre and consequently not be able to attend the emergency. Would you be willing to have a meeting with me to discuss the dismal safety of the cycle ways that you have inherited?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel answered:

Yes I can see no reason why not. If you send me your email we will organise a date.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023

(C) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Graham Smith:

“Given the redevelopment in the Kersey Crescent area that has occurred since the original gating order was imposed in 2008, what grounds does the council have for believing that the threshold for imposing a public spaces protection order prohibiting general use of the footway between Speen Lodge Court and Bath Road in Speen by law-abiding members of the public might be exceeded should the current order not be renewed?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

The PSPO at Speen Lodge Court will expire in October 2023. On the 30 May this year, Corporate Board granted permission to go out to public consultation. It was requested and agreed that the consultation be a review of the current PSPO and to seek views on the future of the PSPO in Speen Lodge Court, should it be discharged, renewed or varied. The results of that consultation will then go back to Corporate Board.

The PSPO was put in place because unfortunately, not all members of the public using the footway were doing so in a law-abiding manner. The PSPO has been a success with no reports of ASB from residents so there are no grounds for knowing whether the threshold would be exceeded or not.

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?”*

Graham Smith asked the following supplementary question:

“How does the council reconcile any support that it may have for the order with its stated desire to encourage active travel and its support for formalising the public accessibility of the track around the back of Donnington Square?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

The Council have to balance out the needs of anti-social behaviour and the access ways and public highways within the district. Where we have concerns from residents about anti-social behaviour we will work with them to try to manage and design that out. In Speen Lodge Court's case that was through what was in effect a gating order. As I said, we are going out to consultation, we will get the feedback of that consultation and then make a relevant decision. I would say we haven't accepted one way or another what we are going to do with that gating order until we have heard from the public through that consultation piece.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by Ian Hall:

“When the contract for the redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate was signed with St Modwen , why was an Environmental Impact Assessment not instructed in 2015?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Thank-you for your question, Mr Hall. I refer you to my response to your earlier question. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a statutory process for evaluating and predicting potential environmental impacts on developments that may meet certain thresholds. Proposed developments go through a screening process and where a scheme is regarded as “EIA development” an Environmental Statement (ES) must be prepared by the applicant to accompany the associated planning application.

Due to the decision of the courts, St Modwen never submitted a planning application for the wholesale development of the London Road Industrial Estate. The Council itself has never submitted such a planning application – had it done so, the proposal would have undergone a screening process to determine whether it was an “EIA development”. However, the Council as landowner did commission a high level Environmental Appraisal Report of the now superseded LRIE Development Brief in 2021, and this is available to view on our [website](#).

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023
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(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by Ian Hall:

“As the football pitch is not part of the LRIE i.e it predates the LRIE and is not an area of protected employment, can the name Bond Riverside be canceled and the LRIE be called the LRIE?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Thank-you for your question, Mr Hall. The name ‘Bond Riverside’ was chosen in March 2023 following a widely publicised LRIE Identity Project competition open to secondary schools and colleges across West Berkshire. The winning entry by a team of young people from Newbury College was chosen by a panel that included a local property agent and a representative of Hemingway Design. The name reflects a local connection to the author Michael Bond as well as the location of the site, next to Riverpark Industrial Estate. The Council has no plans to cancel the new name, which is helpful in distinguishing between the Council-owned site and the wider protected employment area to the north and east which lies outside our ownership.

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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“Protecting our Children and Supporting Education are two of West Berkshire Council’s core business areas that, yet again, have shown good performance in the quarter. I consider that these areas are the most important services delivered by Council and I would like to know what strategies the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education will adopt to sustain the quality of them?”

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

Firstly, I would like to thank Cllr Boeck for the question and for all the hard work he did as the previous portfolio holder for Children, Education and Young People’s Services, and agree that protecting children and supporting education are two of West Berkshire Council’s core areas and very important.

There are definitely success stories locally – the Youth Offending Team recently received an overall rating of 'Outstanding' following inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, and children’s respite care home Castle Gate, recently inspected by Ofsted, received an overall “good” rating. There is also good news with the young adults in our care – currently we have 13 going through university.

However, there some parts that need addressing – in areas of deprivation the school attainment is lower than we would like, and lower than national average.

The council’s financial position is challenging, and though I have lots of ideas, these have yet be costed. In the meantime, I will be working with officers to identify where changes can be made, as well as making contact with local head teachers, early years providers, and liaising with other agencies, such as charitable organisations who are key to our provision, to find innovative and creative ways to sustain the quality of our services.

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for that reply Councillor Codling. I think that safeguarding is one of the single most important responsibilities that we all bear as elected Members. What is your approach to safeguarding children and young people? ”

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

To be fully compliant with the legal requirements.

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

Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 8 June 2023
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“How do the General Fund and Earmarked reserves balances following the 2023 Q4 outturn compare to those presented in the 2019-20 revenue budget?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services answered:

The 2019-20 Revenue budget included a General Fund of £6.6m, Earmarked Reserves of £6.9m and Schools Reserves of £3.7m as at 1st April 2020.

At 1st April 2023 the General Fund is £7.2m, Earmarked Reserves are £4.4m and the ring fenced Schools Reserves are £14m.

That £14m was made up of primary schools of £4.7m, secondary schools of £3.3m and special schools of £5m, plus others of around about £1m which equates to the £14m.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“From those figures is it fair to say that over the previous four years of the Conservative administration, those reserve balances increased in total over the period?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services answered:

Total reserves have increased, however as you know the Schools Reserves is ring fenced and there are reasons why the schools haven't spent that money. From a general fund perspective effectively we have two weeks of reserves to cope with the annual expenditure of roughly £160m per annum.
