

Supplemental Items for Council

Thursday, 5 October, 2023 at 7.00 pm
in Council Chamber Council Offices Market Street Newbury

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Sarah Clarke.

Sarah Clarke
Service Director (Strategy & Governance)

For further information about these items, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager) on 01635 519462

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Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



Supplemental Items
Council to be held on Thursday, 5 October 2023 *(continued)*

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.

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Stephen Chard on telephone (01635) 519462.

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

Question (A)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Alexandra OConnor

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety by James Matos:

“What is the council doing about crime in the Newbury town centre specifically about anti social behaviour”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety answered:

West Berkshire Council works in partnership to address crime and anti-social behaviour with a number of agencies.

West Berkshire Council applied for and was granted a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Newbury town centre which is initially in place for three years. There are two requirements to the PSPO around anti-social street drinking and anti-social behaviour – there are specifics around both of these requirements, but further details are available on the internet. Police have issued 86 ‘directions to leave’ as a result of enforcing the the PSPO with 5 breaches reported and processed by this council.

A representative from the Councils Building Communities Together Team attends both the fortnightly police tactical and co-ordinating group (TTCG) where current police activity and demands are discussed and a weekly tasking meeting where anti-social behaviour hotspots are discussed. The manager also co-Chairs a monthly multi-agency meeting that looks to address anti-social behaviour cases that require a partnership approach, this also includes those subject to Orders, Injunctions and vulnerabilities i.e., cuckooing, county drugs lines. Several departments within WBC are involved in this meeting including YOT, Housing, PPP, Children’s Services alongside partners: TVP, Housing associations, Berkshire Youth, Two Saints. If there are issues within the town centre, then these are the arenas where they will be discussed and solutions sought.

As with all crime and anti-social behaviour we rely on members of the public reporting issues to the police as and when it is happening, and this can be done via 101 or online. There was a lot of effort from a lot of agencies.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

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

James Matos did not ask a supplementary question.



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

Question (B)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	katharine Makant Sam Robins

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by John Gotelee:

“West Berks level 2 SFRA (from JBA consulting) states that 89% of the LRIE is at risk of Fluvial flooding. Have engineers and planners assessed what infrastructure would be needed to mitigate this and prevent floodwater getting into the Thames Water Sewer and illegally flooding property downstream?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Thank you for your question.

No as that is not the purpose of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. As the National Planning Policy Framework sets out in paragraphs 159 to 169. Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding from all sources should be avoided by directing development away from areas at the highest risk and this is what the Local Plan Review does.

If development is proposed, then the rest of the SFRA for LRIE sets out the requirement for SUDs (page 108) and the need for an application site-specific Flood Risk Assessment including modelling and the need for a surface water drainage strategy (page 109).

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“You talked about flood risk assessment on the LRIE so it did not answer the question. Because the Council's water floods their lands should they be intitled to compensation such as Thames Water is finned for discharge of pollution?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development said he would provide a written answer.

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

Question (C)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Jon Winstanley

(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by Alan Pearce:

“My understanding is the Service Director (Environment) currently is organizing a site visit to the London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) including third-party land downstream for officers and Executive Portfolio holders to better understand the surface water infrastructure in relation to redeveloping the LRIE. Please would the Council give some more information about when this site visit is likely to take place and who will be attending?”

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

Mr Pearce, thank you for your question. A site visit has been arranged for 12th October at 2pm to look at the current issues that have been raised with regards the Northbrook Ditch. You will be invited if you wish to come.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“I asked the question as I was concerned that the Portfolio Holder would not understand the drainage issues and wanted to know why the Executive report on the Bond Riverside Review had been delayed”.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel said she would provide a written answer.

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

Question (D)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Jon Winstanley Alexandra O Connor

(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by James Matos:

“What has west Berkshire council done about the petition to remove the phone box outside northbrook street”

This question was withdrawn.

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

Question (E)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Sam Robins

(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by John Gotelee:

“Have planners decided where to create the pond required to store and attenuate the 9000 plus cubic metres of water inside the LRIE red line as advised by the Avison Young environmental report”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Thank you for your question. I am responding instead of my fellow Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement because this is a matter for the Council as landowner, not the Council as Planning Authority.

The planners will become involved when development is proposed on plots on Bond Riverside, at which point any necessary flood mitigations measures for that development will be proposed by the applicant and assessed through the planning process.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“We are the victim of mixed messages as someone has put up a message regarding the bond riverside update at the same time we are told regeneration has been put back. We are told that SUDS works have been completed, can you explain the discrepancy as water needs to be stored now as we are being flooded?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

You asked the question at the last Executive and I refer to that answer.

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

Question (F)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Bryan Lyttle

(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Paula Saunderson:

“In the Detail in Local Plan Review 2022-2039 – there is no ESA Policy for the Dedicated Employment Area known as London Road Estates, and Policy CS20 and 7.10 incorrectly refers to it as the London Road Industrial Estates, and states:

The Council are currently preparing a comprehensive strategy for the delivery of regeneration on the LRIE site. Due to the timing of this strategy and the site's location within the settlement boundary of Newbury, the site has not been identified as a site allocation, however it does need to be recognised as an area of regeneration for its potential to deliver flexibility to the employment figures over the plan period.

Qu. As SP20 is quite vague in respect of detail and there is no ESA Policy for LONDON ROAD ESTATES DEA will there be a Supplementary Planning Document for this whole Area shown as Red Hatched on the LPR 2022-2039 GIS Policy Map or will everything that happens in this Red Hatched Area be subject to a piecemeal and individual approach to Planning?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement answered:

Thank you for your question.

The current Local Development Schedule does not include a Supplementary Planning Document for the area that is red hatched on the LPR 2022-2039 GIS Policy Map. Therefore, under planning policy as it stands redevelopment could be piecemeal as you suggest. However, SPDs are due to be replaced by legislation with supplementary plans which will carry the same weight as local plans. So if we developed London Road Industrial Estate there would be no time to introduce a SPD, consult and introduce it. LRIE and Riverside as mention in the preamble are not he same, this administration has removed the football pitch from development to be retained. LRIE is in the Local Plan as a protected industrial area and will be dependent on other areas for access. The future of the LRIE will be dealt with via the Local Plan review.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

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

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“Every other DEA has another ESA , my concern is the London Road Estate not having a ESA means it does not include the need to do a flood risk assessment that would include appropriate flood measures such as surface water assessments. Can some explain how all the flood risks in the DEA would be accounted for. ”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement answered:

The DEA we are looking at are carried forward from the current Local Plan, they will be dealt with via the new local Plan.

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

Question (G)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Bill Bagnell / Sam Robins

(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by John Gotelee:

“Regarding the recent groundwater depth survey (2022/23) carried out on the LRIE what was the minimum and maximum levels on the football pitch and outside the pumping station?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel

Football Ground: Minimum 1.5ms, Maximum 2ms
Thames Water Pumping Station: Consistent at 1.3ms

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

“9,000 Cubic Metres is needed to be stored on the site in a pond that can not b done if you do not have the depth. How will this problem be overcome?”

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

Consultants SUDS report, as part of the Place Making Strategy, will be published shortly.

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

Question (H)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Bryan Lyttle

(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development by Paula Saunderson:

“As per my first question, the Bond Riverside Redevelopment Lands are included in the London Road Estates DEA and ,as previously announced, there WILL be a Supplementary Planning Document for everything within the Red Lines for those lands (previously known as LRIE and NEW 1), so how is that progressing, when will it be delivered, and how will it fit in with the rest of the lands within the London Road Estates DEA which are not subject to ESA Policy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

Thank you for your question. I am responding instead of my fellow Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement because this is a matter for the Council as landowner, not the Council as Planning Authority.

As my colleague said earlier, the Local Development Schedule currently does not propose a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). However, the Council's Executive did commit to bringing forward an SPD as part of the refreshed Bond Riverside Delivery Strategy approved by the Council's Executive in June 2022. We are currently reviewing the Delivery Strategy to align with the new administration's commitment to re-introducing football at the Faraday Road Ground. Further information will be provided when the report comes forward to Executive later this year.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“Will you consider having an EAS which would include a flood risk assessment, that will include sustainable water surface drainage system within the red hatch area of the CEA”.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration Growth and Strategy Development answered:

This will come back as part of the Bond Riverside Delivery Strategy.

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



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

Question (I)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Jon Winstanley

(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by Paula Saunderson:

“The Newbury North Brook – which was an ancient Chalk Stream but is now called a Drainage Ditch – is increasingly subject to Flood Risk & Pollution & Silt & Debris Build-up: from Upstream Surface Water Drainage Outfalls – Black Pollution, from Groundwater Saturation, and an increase in Out of Bank Flooding Incidents, Qu: Within the LPR 2022-2039 IDP -Infrastructure Development Plan – there is no funding identified for Northbrook Improvement Project(s) so how will Finance be provided to Mitigate these increasing problems, and by whom?”

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

Ms Saunderson, thank you for your question. The Northbrook ditch rises to the west of Newbury Town Centre near Goldwell park and is culverted in a Thames Water surface water sewer for much of its length through the town centre and emerges from the sewer to the east the London Road Industrial Estate. The surface water catchment for this sewer covers much of Newbury Town Centre (approx. 70 hectares or 100 football pitches). Where it is an open ditch, it is classed as an ordinary watercourse and is subject to land drainage law. Maintenance and upkeep of the ditch therefore falls to the adjacent landowners, known as ‘riparian’ owners. It is likely that the build-up of silt and the increased frequency of flooding are connected, I will therefore ask colleagues in the Council’s Drainage and Flood Risk Team to visit the site and contact landowners if maintenance or clearance is needed.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you contact all of the nine owners as this is rising on their land and they have no control”

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

Once the assessment has been done if it is required we will do so.

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



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

Question (J)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Jon Winstanley

(J) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by Paula Saunderson:

“The Newbury Northbrook is now a Surface & Groundwater Drainage System with increasing Problems and Risks to Humans and Wildlife, so which Departments in WBC have a role in addressing these issues and how are they going about mitigating them please?”

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

Ms Saunderson, thank you for your question. Any pollution in watercourses is obviously a concern, however this falls within the remit of the Environment Agency and not West Berkshire Council. I believe the Environment Agency are aware of this issue. With regards the flood risk, as per my previous answer, I will ask colleagues from the Council's Drainage and Flood Risk team to visit site and assess if any clearance work is needed by adjacent 'riparian' landowners.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“Will you visit the ten sites as they are individual with individual circumstances.”

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

We will visit each ten sites.

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



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

Question (A)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Gabrielle Mancini

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation by Councillor Boeck:

“Does the Portfolio Holder believe that the Council has the capabilities (both sponsorship and delivery) to achieve the successful outcomes required from the transformation projects?”

The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation provided the following written response:

Yes. The transformation programme is led by a Service Director who was appointed on a two-year fixed term basis following a member-led recruitment process in April 2023 and who will act as project sponsor for the projects it contains.

It is anticipated that the vast majority of the work contained within the programme's projects will be carried out from within existing resources as the Council has in-house specialists in project management, property, legal, HR and other relevant disciplines as well as subject matter experts in the service areas falling within the scope of the programme.

Where there is a business case for additional investment in order to realise the benefits of the programme, this will be considered on its merits by senior officers and members of the Executive.

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

Question (B)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	April Peberdy

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety by Councillor Dick:

“Can the Leader explain why he told the Chairman of Newbury Rugby Club that the Sports Hub is not going ahead when no decision has been made by the Executive?”

The Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety provided the following written response:

I told them that subject to the Executive decision, following my recommendation, we would not be progressing it.

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

Question (C)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Sarah Clarke

(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety by Councillor Mackinnon:

“Does the Leader believe that the language and tone used by Cllr Chris Read in his letter published in the Newbury Weekly News on 21 September are appropriate for use when responding to a member of the public?”

The Leader of Council; Executive Portfolio Holder Strategy, Communications and Public Safety provided the following written response:

Thank you for the question.

As you are aware, all Members are required to adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct, which is based on the principles of public life including leadership and accountability, and the Councillor's Code of Conduct requires that Members treat others with courtesy and respect. I am confident that all Members will be mindful of their duties in this regard when acting in their capacity as Members of this Council.

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

Question (D)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Kofi Adu-Gyamfi

(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity by Councillor Kander:

“The Liberal Democrat manifesto promised to remove the Garden Waste charge – can the portfolio holder confirm that the administration will keep that promise, and when?”

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity provided the following written response:

The Administration remains committed to phasing out the garden waste charge. Options are being considered to determine the best way to achieve this objective, whilst managing the Council's challenging financial situation. Further details will be announced as soon as we can.

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

Question (E)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	April Pederdy

(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Woollaston:

“Had the ill-fated Judicial Review of the Sports Hub not occurred, when would the Sports Hub likely have been opened?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside provided the following written response:

Whilst the initial target date for completion, identified at the start of the project, was March 2022, planning permission was only granted on 16 March 2022. The expected duration of the project was 32 weeks, plus 14 weeks lead in for utilities. So the anticipated completion date could have been in February 2023.

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

Question (F)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Paul Coe

(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health Integration by Councillor Stewart:

“What effect has the recruitment and retention initiative had on Social Work staff numbers?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health Integration provided the following written answer:

There has been a significant review of the Recruitment and Retention package for Social Workers within Children and Family Services. We haven't at this time done the same within Adult Social Care for a variety of reasons. We have, for example, undertaken some targeted work on improving the staffing position in our care homes – with very positive effects – as this was more pressing.

The challenge in Adult Social Care is not as pronounced as in Children and Family Services when it comes to Social Work posts and we have a range of existing measures in train, such as the 'grow your own' work. This has led to some positive impacts and we have recently seen two Social Work graduates and one Occupational Therapy graduate.

Also, in the last 6 months there have been 20 new starters in our care homes and another four are due to start before early November. Another three positions have been offered. Most of these were previously agency staff. Six new casual staff have also been registered.

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

Question (G)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Eric Owens

(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Councillor Bennyworth:

“Could the Portfolio Holder please advise how the Liberal Democrat’s manifesto pledge to re-introduce neighbourhood notifications for planning applications is progressing?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement provided the following written response:

Thank-you for your question. The manifesto pledge to re-introduce neighbour notification letters is progressing well and in fact we intend to start sending them out this week as part of a pilot project. As an interim measure, we are using an in-house team to do this but we expect to move to an automated system in the very near future once the digital links are set up.

The parameters are as follows:

Major applications – 50-meter buffer around the plotted red line.

Minor applications including Householder – immediate neighbours to the side, front and rear. If there is a highway in between the proposal and neighbours, then this will be included.

Other applications – as above.

We will only notify neighbours on the submission of the initial application. We will not write to them with any amendments, or when the decision is made under delegated powers.

Forecast Cost

It is estimated that the in-year cost to Planning Services is between £8 - £10k (including the interim process). This is only an estimate as if the authority receives more major applications, then we will be sending out more letters.

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

It is estimated that over a 12-month period using the automated service approach that between 20,000 and 24,000 letters will be sent out on planning applications, with a total cost of circa £11.5k.

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

Question (H)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Michelle Sancho

(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services by Councillor Boeck:

"What plans does the Portfolio Holder have to reduce spending on taking children to school?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services provided the following written response:

The Home to School Transport budget has been under invested in for a number of years: The cost for 2021/22 was £3.2m, in 2022/23 it was £3.6m and for this financial year in spite of the predicted rise in both numbers of pupils entitled to transport, and an increase in those pupils with EHCPs the previous administration budgeted for only £3.5m – clearly an insufficient with the additional cost of living rise.

There is an ongoing review to look at how best to deliver the service to meet the needs of children and young people.

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

Question (I)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Joseph Holmes

(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services by Councillor Mackinnon:

“When you promised at the Budget meeting in March that you would present an emergency budget if the Liberal Democrats were elected, had you consulted with officers regarding that promise?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services provided the following written repose:

We said we would commence an emergency budget, however context was always going to be “dependant” on what we inherited on taking office on May 25th. What we discovered is certainly a financial emergency, at Q1 a projected year end net deficit. The triage required to get our year end finances to balance is requiring significant hard work by officers and members to do so via the Financial Review Panel. Our ability to balance the books is not helped by the relative low level of reserves we have inherited by the previous administration. As well a somewhat optimistic budget set below the inflation levels continue to stay high throughout 2023.

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

Question (J)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Paul Coe

(J) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health Integration by Councillor Stewart:

“The Liberal Democrat manifesto promised to ensure care packages are in place as early as possible through earlier initial care assessments. Can the portfolio holder advise what progress has been made with this promise?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health Integration provided the following written answer:

Firstly, I would like to reassure people that all contacts with the Adult Social Care teams are triaged, so that we respond most quickly to those whose needs are most urgent.

At present, the waiting times are holding steady. Unfortunately, we are needing to take the current financial position and growth in demand into account when considering the pace at which we make changes.

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

Question (K)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Eric Owens

(K) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Councillor Mackinnon:

“The Council Strategy makes only a single mention of the Local Plan, that it will be amended to ensure new housing developments come with suitable infrastructure and enhances amenities. Can the portfolio holder explain his current view on the proposed number of homes for the North East Thatcham strategic site, and whether his view has changed since the election?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement provided the following written response:

Thank you for that Question Cllr Mackinnon. I drafted the Lib Dem response to the Reg 19 Local Plan Review but it was approved by the whole of our Group and signed off by the current Leader of Council. As regards the North East Thatcham site, there were and still are some very competent Lib Dem town councillors who worked up Thatcham Town Council's response, as well as District Ward Members for Thatcham who know their town and their constituents' priorities better than I do. You can read all responses relating to the site on the website.

Our response took on board those views. You ask specifically about my personal view now and whether it has changed since then. My answer is: not a lot.

I still believe that we can and should have more new homes within the settlement areas of Newbury & Thatcham, that the windfall allowance is unrealistically modest, and that consequently we can persuade the Inspector that fewer homes are needed on North East Thatcham site than you and your colleagues imposed on it. We also want to see more infrastructure gained through this development for the town, in or near the town centre. And it isn't just Thatcham that is unhappy with this site. So is Bucklebury.

But because you rushed through the Reg 19 submission, we have to be realistic and conscious of all the many risks that face us whatever course of action we may take before and/or during an Examination. We have several options. None of them are risk or cost free. We will need to decide which one to take before too long.

The Examination by the Inspector has technically started but oral hearings don't start until "early next year". Even if we hadn't taken control from you in May, we know now that the Inspector found many aspects of your Reg 19 draft that required extensive clarification and justification, so the delay from September was almost certainly necessary even if officers had been working for you and not us. The answers to those questions – all 77 of them – were published on the Inspector's website on 2nd October and PAG has seen most of them already.

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

We are working towards making as many changes to the Reg 19 Plan as we can without having to withdraw and start again, which is the last thing I personally wish to do. But we have not ruled that option out.



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

Question (L)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Gabrielle Mancini

(L) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation by Councillor Boeck:

“Does the Portfolio Holder consider that it would be useful to obtain independent assurance of the transformation programme”

The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation provided the following written answer:

Yes, and this has already been sought at both officer and member level through contacts within the Local Government Association.

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

Question (M)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Paul Coe

(M) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services by Councillor Mackinnon:

"Why does the Council Strategy state that the Council will endeavour to retain all current Local Authority maintained schools within the Local Authority, rather than becoming Academies?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services provided the following written answer:

In January 2022 research conducted on behalf of the Local Government Association found 92% of local authority maintained schools were ranked outstanding or good by Ofsted, compared with 85% of academies that have been graded since they converted.

It also found only 45% of academies that were already an academy in August 2018 managed to improve standards from inadequate or requires improvement to good or outstanding, compared with 56% of council-maintained schools.

Although we have a good working relationship with our local academies, if this council is to be properly accountable for education for all of our young people and ensure we continue to drive up standards, this administration feels we are better placed to do this if schools are within the local authority family rather than at arms length within an academy of which we have no formal oversight.

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

Question (N)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Eric Owens

(N) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Councillor Boeck:

“How is the Portfolio Holder going to address the shortage of staff in the Planning service?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement provided the following written response:

Thank-you for your question. We have a number of vacancies within the Planning Service at present, owing partly to a national shortage of professional planners and partly to the Council's own budget challenges which has made it necessary to freeze recruitment to non-business-critical posts. However, we are delighted to welcome two new officers into the Conservation and Developer Contributions teams this week and we are actively recruiting a permanent Development Manager, a Planning Policy Team Leader and a Principal Ecologist. Earlier this year, we welcomed two new graduates into the Development Management team and our recent procurement of a supplier of Level 7 Apprenticeships means we are able to offer development opportunities to existing staff to qualify as RTP1 accredited planners.

Finally, last month we submitted a bid to the Government's Planning Skills Delivery Fund for £90,000 to buy in additional support to clear the current backlog of planning applications - we hope to have some further good news on this later this month. In the meantime, we're making sure that all applications that come in are validated as quickly as possible and consultation initiated, even if we can't immediately allocate them to a case officer.

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

Question (O)	Meeting on 05 October 2023
Relevant Officer(s):	Gabrielle Mancini

(O) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation by Councillor Boeck:

“Will the current cost constraints increase the risk to delivery of a set of successful outcomes from the transformation programme beyond the council's risk appetite?”

The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation provided the following written response:

The Council balances the risks and benefits within each project before taking decisions. It does so through the use of robust governance arrangements and transparent risk management through project-based and corporate risk registers. As indicated in the answer to one of my previous questions, where there is a business case for additional investment in order to realise the benefits of the programme, this will be considered on its merits by senior officers and members of the Executive and the cost benefit ratio in respect of finance, customer experience and risk will be carefully examined through this process.

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

