

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 25th July 2024

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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Agenda Item 20.

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“Are the final overall costs of the aborted Monks Lane Sports Hub project known ? If so what are they?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for your question. I can refer you to the Executive report - Review of the Newbury Sports Hub Development of 2 November 2023, where the figure of £214,537.90 - £219,537.90 was detailed.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration by John Gotelee:

“Please could the portfolio holder for economic development explain what the vision for the LRIE is, ie what is the end result going to look like?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:

Thank you for your question Mr. Gotelee. While we cannot predict at this stage what the physical appearance of Bond Riverside will be in the future, our goals and strategic objectives for the estate are described in the programme review report that was approved by Executive in May 2024. These include regeneration of key sites for mixed-uses and employment, community and leisure facilities, greening, and improved connectivity with the town centre.

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:

“I’m quite a visual person and I like to see how things are going to look and the way that the London Road Industrial Estate there just doesn’t seem to be any vision. I notice that one of the freeholds is up for sale and in the sales detail, it has nice pictures of nice offices and what it is going to look like. Would it not be possible for you to put out what your actual designs are and some hint of what it is going to look like?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:

First of all, we can’t predict exactly what the entirety of the estate is going to look like in the future.

On your point about the freehold going out to sale, that is actually a mistake. It was unfortunately an old advert that was publicised by the agent, and they have been instructed to take it down by the leaseholder, so that should no longer be appearing on that particular site.

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

Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“Why is the council preferring to spend council tax payers money on the Faraday Road Football Ground project than securing a grant via the Football Federation/FA?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that the Council is intending to bid for funding from the FA for any elements that would potentially meet the FA funding requirements.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:

“What is the economic sense in removing much-used parking spaces along Faraday Rd? There is a loss of income from the spaces and a new cost of maintenance. Can you explain how this is sensible when one aim is to increase employment on the estate?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Mr Gotelee, thank you for your question.

When making decisions, the Council must balance a number of often competing priorities. Economy, environment and the health and wellbeing of our residents to name a few. Whilst some parking revenue will be lost, it is considered minimal and will be more than compensated by the environmental, flood risk management and subsequent wellbeing benefits of providing the raingardens on Faraday Road. I hope you agree this is an excellent initiative and one we would wish to replicate in other critical drainage areas around the district.

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:

“I’m afraid we are going to have to disagree on this because the greening is just like me crashing a car and getting it re-sprayed and hoping the scrap dealer will give me more money. Don’t you think that it is a complete and utter waste of money?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

No because it is greening the public realm and the provision of rain gardens such as those on Faraday Road is an excellent way of draining the highway sustainably which I know is something that you particularly care about. It slows down the surface water run-off and reduces flood risk which in this instance we know is in a flood risk area. It also helps to filter out pollutants from the highway and will provide much needed greenery in an area dominated by bricks and concrete. Therefore, I do not think it is a bad idea and I think we should be striving for more of these around West Berkshire.

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“Would it be a good idea to rename the ground , the Newbury Community Football Ground?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:

Thank you – there are, currently, no plans to change the name of the Faraday Rd Football Ground.

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

Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(F) Question submitted to the Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications by John Gotelee:

“Is there a possible conflict of interest when all the ward councillors of a district are portfolio holders on the Executive?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you for your question.

All Portfolio Holders on the Executive are elected as ward councillors. However, it is not correct, as suggested in your question, to say that all ward councillors of a district are portfolio holders. There are 43 councillors elected to serve the residents of West Berkshire, but a maximum of 10 councillors who can be Members of the Executive.

If you mean can ward councillors from the same ward be on the Executive, then Members should always be alert to potential conflicts of interest, and we have detailed rules and guidance on this in the West Berkshire Councils Councillor's Code of Conduct (which appears at Appendix H of Part 13 of the Constitution) ([Part 1 \(westberks.gov.uk\)](https://www.westberks.gov.uk)). All Members of West Berkshire Council must adhere to these rules when making decisions.

We have to look above a ward matter and vote on the best thing for the district, in the same way that the Cabinet wouldn't vote on something in their constituency, they would look for the best result for the country. If your question is asking whether being a ward member gives rise to a conflict of interest, then our Code of Conduct would prevent a member from being appointed to the Council's Executive if that was the case.

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

Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Deputy Leader; Planning & Housing by John Gotelee:

“The council has expressed a wish for Faraday Gateway to build residential property in a mixed development. What are the implications to the freehold which is council (public) land?”

The Portfolio Holder for Deputy Leader; Planning & Housing answered:

Thank you for your question, Mr Gotelee. I think you actually mean Gateway Plaza rather than Faraday Gateway.

At present residential development can only be delivered by current consents. Different residential proposals would be subject to planning. However, both approaches are subject themselves to financial viability. If current consented residential proposals or alternative proposals (subject to consent) prove viable, disposal would be on the basis of either a freehold or long lease. We don't have any plans currently in the pipeline.

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:

“The bit that worried me was that if you allow residential development on it, say a block of flats that I believe is wanted, then after two years and a day the leaseholder can take the freehold, which seems like disposal of a freehold by the back door. Should it come to the Executive first?”

The Portfolio Holder for Deputy Leader; Planning & Housing answered:

No plans have actually come forward on that site yet that we have actually agreed to so at the moment there is nothing in the pipeline that we have agreed to.

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor David Marsh:

“What progress has been made with the proposals for Newbury Town Council and other parishes to take over responsibility for recycling bins and dog waste bins in their areas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for this question, Cllr Marsh.

Over the past couple of years, a few town and parish councils have taken over responsibility for dog waste bins particularly ones that they had previously installed themselves in their area. Newbury Town Council (NTC), for example, has chosen this option for selected dog bins. West Berkshire Council continues to service many other dog bins in the NTC area. Town and parish councils may wish to discuss taking on dog and litter bins under the council's devolution process. West Berkshire Council also has arrangements with selected town and parish councils for emptying their recycling and litter bins.

Separately, West Berkshire Council is currently considering a range of additional services which it can take on and deliver on behalf of interested towns and parishes. Further details will be made available to key stakeholders in due course.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“As a fellow member of Newbury Town Council, I am sure that you would agree with me that it is extremely efficient and has really good bins for this, and many of the West Berkshire bins are old and frankly not fit for purpose and are constantly overflowing because they are too small. I appreciate that money is tight, but I do think that there could be a programme of replacing some of these because if you look at a Town Council one against a West Berkshire one, there is no comparison, and there is now a health issue with some of the West Berkshire ones.”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:

I would say that if a town or parish takes over control of the dog waste bins then they are fully able to source new bins. You mentioned that there are tight budgetary constraints, and it may be, as said in that previous answer, that the devolution aspect may come into play and of course the other thing is that parishes are very welcome to contribute to West Berkshire for additional collections. That would be something we could consider as well.

The Leader of the Council commented:

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

We will be putting a parish offering together for all the parishes and all sorts of services quite soon.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024

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

“When and how can the situation be changed regarding naming of rural roads whereby, because the legislation is 100 years out of date, emergency services and vital home deliveries are sometimes failing to reach their destination because so many have no name assigned to them in the National Street Gazetteer, despite these roads often having locally used names and despite repeated requests from parish councils to be allow to have those names used officially?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Councillor Vickers, thank you for your question.

The Council's Highways Network Management team is currently reviewing its Street Naming and Numbering Policy and I would happily include you in that review process given your concerns.

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

Councillor Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“The parish councils raised this with me and 20 years ago I was professionally involved in the creation of the National Street Gazetteer as a non-executive director of the trade body association of geographic information, and it's a shame that because the legislation is so out of date it doesn't cope with the initial naming of a road. Given that work is taking place on this can we try and lobby through the LGA that there is a solution to this very specific problem which the current legislation and guidance fails to address?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Yes, I am happy to work with officers and yourself to pull that lobbying position together so that we can make sure that we include all of the information required.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor David Marsh:

“What procedures does West Berkshire Council have in place to ensure that the governance of academies in the district is robust and accountable?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

In England an academy is a state-funded school directly funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and is independent of local authority control.

The DfE Regional Directors are responsible for delivering support and challenge to academies, and makes sure governance is in line with national regulations. This includes managing requests to transfer to academy status.

However, this Council has a responsibility for the outcomes of all children living or learning in West Berkshire, and officers continue to work with all schools.

Our officers meet regularly with the DfE to review progress and raise any concerns in relation to the operation of academies in our area.

In addition, the Council continues to deliver a range of services to academies. In some areas, such as safeguarding and Special Educational Needs, the Council retains a statutory role whilst in others, such as school improvement and governor support, services are traded.

We aim for an effective partnership with all schools and academies in the area. Our focus remains on ensuring all children and young people achieve their best outcomes.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“When you say that you are responsible for all children, which I am very pleased to have confirmed, and if there were concerns about the governance of an academy then it would be a matter of concern for the council?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

It would have to be raised with the Regional Directors or via the Governors. If it was a safeguarding issue or SEND then it would definitely be us, but really the Regional Directors at the Department for Education would be the best place to go if you have a concern.

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

Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 25 July 2024
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(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor David Marsh:

“What is the reason for the delay in extending traffic-free hours in Newbury town centre into the evening, which was meant to happen in time for the spring and summer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Cllr Marsh, thank you for your question.

The extension of the pedestrianisation in the town centre needs Secretary of State approval and an application to the Department for Transport (DfT), was submitted earlier this year. Unfortunately, the DfT have struggled to grasp the difference between an experimental traffic regulation order and a traffic regulation order which has hampered the progress somewhat. The information that they have requested on further stakeholder engagement regarding this change means we will not be in position to bring in the change for the summer months as we would have aimed for and hoped for. We also encountered delays with regards to the General Election being called and the DfT stating that they would not be in a position to review again until later in the year. Let's hope with a more friendly and devolution focused new government than the ex-conservative prime Minister that we may get some more traction on this one. We will be undertaking an engagement exercise in the near future to gather the information and will be re-submitting our request for the DfT in time to undertake a trial next year.



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