

Questions and Answers

Council
Thursday 28 November 2024

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

- (A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:2
- (B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:3
- (C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:4
- (D) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:5
- (E) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:7
- (F) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:8



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

Question (A)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“West Berkshire District Council's current Waste PFI (Private Finance Initiative) contract with Veolia expires in 2032. As a consequence West Berkshire District Council will need to commission new service arrangements. Waste Contracts are complex and costly. In order to deliver a 'fit-for-purpose' and cost effective contract for West Berkshire citizens will the Council agree to develop and release a Waste Commissioning Strategy including an associated programme of activity which will influence and shape the forthcoming new arrangements?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The Council will robustly assess the range of options available to us when the existing contract expires. As part of the process, we will refer to good industry practice, learn lessons from other authority areas and engage with external advisors, as appropriate. Closer to the period for procuring the new service delivery option, the recommended approach will be suitably scrutinised by relevant Council governance bodies including the Procurement Board.

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

Question (B)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“Baroness Humphreys, a member of the House of Lords, has recently stated Conwy County Borough Council's (North Wales) switch to four-weekly collections of residual waste, resulted in an 11% spike in the tonnage of recyclables collected and a reduction of 12% residual waste. A Conwy Council member put this down to residents being incredibly motivated to recycle combined with the local and global benefits of recycling. West Berkshire citizens are equally motivated to ensure their valuable waste resources remain in circulation for as long as possible and wish to avoid them being incinerated. West Berkshire District Council's burning of waste continues to increase - in the reporting year 2014/15 - 30% of collected waste was incinerated, the reporting period 2022/23 resulted in 42% of waste being incinerated, this is a notable upward trend representing a 13% increase in less than 10 years.

These increases suggest WBDC are yet to implement the necessary changes to reflect their continued assertions about their overall recycling successes. Moving to a four-weekly collection is a small step for West Berkshire citizens and a wise leap for WBDC. Will WBDC's new administration reverse the previous administration's trend towards the increased incineration of waste and agree to implement four-weekly collections of residual waste?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thanks for your question.

We continue to make improvements such as the introduction of separate food waste collections and expanding the types of materials we collect for recycling, whilst encouraging residents and businesses to minimise waste generation. It has to be noted that the general waste we currently send to energy from waste facilities could have ended up in landfill instead. For example, our use of landfilling has reduced from 66% in 2008 to just 4% of waste collected last year. According to the Waste Hierarchy, the use of energy from waste facilities is a preferable option compared to landfilling which is considerably more harmful for the environment. The Council recently conducted a public consultation on our draft Waste Management Strategy. The measures and service changes consulted on include a potential change to three-weekly collections for general waste. A four-weekly general waste collection approach is currently not under consideration. The results of the consultation will be carefully considered before decision makers settle on the final measures to be implemented. The new Strategy is expected to be published during spring 2025.



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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are areas of known wildlife rich habitat designated as non-statutory protected sites. Proposed Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS) are sites identified as presenting comparable rich habitats to LWSs however are yet to benefit from the relevant professional ecological survey(s) and panel review assessment.

Will West Berkshire District Council join other environmentally responsible Councils and add pLWS to West Berkshire District Council's countryside portfolio and maps?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The Council is fully committed to protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats within the District. The Council declared an Ecological Emergency in October 2023, following the declaration of a Climate Emergency in summer 2019. Across the District, we continue to work with BBOWT, our wildlife partner to protect important areas for wildlife. Additional work continues within the community, sometimes led by community groups, and supported by organisations such as the Greenham Trust, to enhance nature corridors, canals and towpaths.

There are specific planning policies that address wildlife preservation, including:

West Berkshire Core Strategy existing policy CS17 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) which requires all new development to maximise opportunities for net gain in biodiversity and create ecological enhancements, including wildlife corridors.

Emerging policy SP11 in the West Berkshire Local Plan Review also specifically provides protection for sites that meet the criteria for designation as a Local Wildlife Site (including proposed wildlife sites).

We would be happy to add the proposed local wildlife sites layer to our online mapping, this information is also publicly available from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC).

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(D) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:

“The Inspector required additional sites to be put forward as Site Allocations within the Plan and the dates to be changed from 2023-2041, yet nowhere in the Main Modifications & Calculations for the Housing Trajectory on pages 198-200 of the MM Document are these sites included:

- a. Newbury Gardens Day Nursery (5 Flats),*
- b. Kennet Centre (427 Flats) ,*
- c. Pound St. including Jewsons Yard (79 dwellings with 69 Flats),*
- d. Land East Of Newbury College at Monks Lane (75 Dwellings with 42 Flats)*

So why were these be considered as Windfall and not proper Site Allocations with their own Policies?”

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question.

The sites that are referred to are all located within the settlement boundary of Newbury, whereby the principle of development is already established. As the principle is already supported, the Local Plan Review does not allocate any sites for development on land inside settlement boundaries.

As far as the housing land supply position is concerned, the Inspector is clear that the base date should be 1 April 2023. Therefore, any planning permissions granted after April 2023 on unallocated sites are considered as windfalls. These permissions provide flexibility to the housing supply and help to make sure the minimum housing requirement can be met within the plan period.

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:

“Some sites allocated in the plan are within settlement boundaries, such as the ones in Lambourne, Hermitage, and Compton. Therefore, why is Newbury any different?”



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

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

I am not able to determine if the sites you mentioned were in settlement boundaries during this meeting. However, if a list of these could be provided, I will examine this point.



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

Question (E)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

(E) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:

“Under MM31 Pgs 101-103 at the bottom of Pag 102 the modifications helpfully clarify the New Name for Bond Riverside and its positioning within the Plan, however the wording is still erroneous in its reference to the Title of the DEDICATED EMPLOYMENT AREA that it sits with, as the DEA is actually called the LONDON ROAD ESTATES as Listed in Appendix 4 of the Original Submission, so can this be rectified please?”

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question. You are right that there is discrepancy in the LPR as to how the Designated Employment Area (DEA) is referenced in the supporting text to policy SP20 and Appendix 4 of the LPR. We certainly get this rectified through a ‘minor’ modification to Appendix 4 to refer to the ‘London Road Industrial Estates’.

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:

“My understanding was that the ‘Industrial’ part did not apply to the broader land. This was previously referred to as the ‘London Road Estate’, whereas it was the Council land that was called the ‘London Road Industrial Estate’. Therefore, Appendix 4 should remain, but the word industrial should be removed from the pages I identified.

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

I would be happy to look into that for you.

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

Question (F)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(F) Question related to item 10 submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:

“With a large number of Newbury Settlement & Greenham Parish Planning Applications considered by WAPC in 2024 coming forward as FLATTED DEVELOPMENTS of increased Density does the Council feel it has adequate Policies within the LPR 2022-2038 submission and these Main Modifications to properly cover:

- a. *Design and Density of Tall Building Developments in terms of maximum densities and heights in line with the new National Model Design Code (NMDC?)*
- b. *A Policy covering Build To Rent similar to other Reg 19 Local Plans?*
- c. *Cumulative Impact of lack of provision for Public Open Spaces and not meeting the Natural England Doorstep and Neighbourhood Criteria for Access to Natural Green Spaces (ANGS)?*
- d. *How these Cumulative Numbers of Flats are reflective of the latest identified Housing Need and how will they be reflected in the Authority Monitoring Review?”*

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for the questions.

Yes, the Council is content that, in conjunction with national policy and guidance, the policies in the LPR set out a strategy for distributing development whilst protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

- a) In relation to the specific issues raised in relation to tall buildings, I would refer in particular to Policies SP1, SP7.
- b) The LPR does not have a policy on every issue and that includes not having a specific policy on ‘build to rent’. If appropriate, such a policy could be considered as part of the next Local Plan. I would be happy to consider this for the future.
- c) In relation to public open space I would refer in particular to policies SP7, SP10, DM40.

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

- d) Policy SP18 which deals with 'Housing Type and Mix' was informed by the updated Local Housing Need Assessment undertaken in 2022. The study looked at a range of statistics such as demographic projections and the profile of housing across the District in terms of size and tenure and made recommendations for the mix for future dwelling sizes by tenure required for market and affordable housing.

The Council does not currently monitor housing mix data as part of the AMR. It is hopeful however, that should resources be made available in the future, this could form part of our annual monitoring.

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:

“On point B, there was September 2018 guidance from Government which said that Local Plans should have a policy on ‘Build to Rent’ as there was a definition included in the National Planning Policy Framework. Did the Council accidentally miss this as it will be important moving forward. In addition, as several flats had been recently approved by planning committees, it would be nice to track that number in the AMR”.

The Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing answered:

On your point about question B, at the time the Plan was written, that directive was not published. However, I would be happy to consider this for the future.

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

- (A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement by Councillor Dominic Boeck:2
- (B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:4
- (C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:5
- (D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Chris Read:6

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“Incidents of anti-social behaviour continue to terrify residents in Aldermaston ward and to have highly detrimental effects on the viability of local businesses. At the last meeting of the Executive Committee on 7 November, the portfolio holder for Public Protection, Cllr. Jason Pemberton, said he will help anyone affected by this behaviour and Council Leader, Cllr. Jeff Brooks, promised to meet me with Cllr. Pemberton, to discuss these matters. Will they both tell Council what progress they have made against their promises?”

The Portfolio Holder for Executive Portfolio Holder: Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

I met with Thames Valley Police (TVP) and officers from the Build Communities Together Team and Public Protection Partnership, as well as the Service Director on 15 November 2024:

- I am progressing actions in relation to planning and licensing.
- TVP have conducted a review of the ongoing problem-solving occurrence in the Parish and the summary was then circulated to Aldermaston Parish Council, amongst others, and Councillor Dominic Boeck was included in this circulation.
- A meeting has been arranged with Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Boeck, and myself for 29 November 2024.

It is vital that incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) are reported to the police when they are happening with as much information and detail as possible to give the police the best opportunity to investigate further. If incidents are not reported, the police will not be aware.

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?”*

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for arranging the meeting, but I hope that delay does not reflect your priorities. What work has been done since the Parish Council raised their ASB case review in July 2023, and why was the Parish Council not informed that the review had been abandoned?”

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

The Portfolio Holder for Executive Portfolio Holder: Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

Thank you for the supplementary question. As ward member, you are entitled to contact the Building Communities Together Team who would have provided an update on the reasons why the ASB case review was not granted. Also, I do not accept the premise of the question that nothing has been done to address the issues in the Parish. TVP have set up a problem-solving framework, issued a community survey, spoken to local residents, and consulted with multiple teams across the Council and the Parish Council. The ASB request that you mention in July 2023 was two months after the election and the new administration had taken control of the Council. As the ASB issues in the area pre-existed this time, what progress did you make.



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

Question (B)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“At the District Parish Conference on 29 October, parish council members were invited to consider paying for higher service levels in highways gully cleansing and sign cleaning than the proposed, cost saving levels. A member of Aldermaston Parish Council asked whether WBC will consider paying for appropriate service levels on the busy A340 that passes through Aldermaston Village and Wharf, rather than expect residents to pick up the tab. Cllr. Jeff Brooks promised to look into the matter; what conclusions has he made?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for your question. Roadside gullies along the A340 through Aldermaston are currently subject to an annual cleanse in line with similar roads across the district, an approach set by the previous Conservative administration. With regard to road signs, since our road sign cleaning programme began earlier this year, introduced by this administration, 240 signs have been cleaned along the rural A340 near Aldermaston and a total of 550 signs across rural areas of West Berkshire. Road signs are also cleaned on a reactive basis when reported via the ‘reportaproblem’ online tool or after an inspection by the highways team.

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?”*

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you. The specific question related to why Aldermaston Parish Council should pay to have the signs cleaned more regularly and the gullies cleared more frequently if it is the general public who use the A340 who benefit, not the Parish residents”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for the supplementary. The signs are cleaned more now than they were under your administration. Gullies are also cleaned in line with the policies in your administration – we made no service cuts and manage this on a risk-based approach.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“What effect has the recent changes to community bus services had on rural isolation?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for the question. The new Thatcham Connect on-demand bus service, together with timetabled services Community Connect B and Community Connect C commenced on 4 November replacing services 41 and 44. This has been so successful to date that we have had to add a further service. This service also visits rural villages that have never been able to be services by regular bus services.

The Thatcham Connect Models is based on a similar model to the rural Downlands Connect and Community Connect A services that launched earlier in the year. Since the launch of the Downloads Connect Services, we have seen a 9 per cent increased in usage in the same time period that the 5, 5A, and 5C buses ran serving both new and old passengers.

In both cases of Thatcham and Downlands Connect Services, reactions have been positive and existing as well as new users have benefited from the additional flexibility for our rural communities.

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?”*

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“In cases where the service is not working satisfactorily and meeting the needs of, especially elderly residents, what improvements can you make”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

As said, we have received very positive feedback. However, if you have received negative feedback I am always happy to see what service improvements we can make. However, without that information and data I cannot answer that tonight. Please do bring this to me and I will happily work it through with Officers.

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Chris Read:

"I have been written to by the largest employers in my ward of Bucklebury, Brockhurst School and Elstree School regarding the policy of tax on education.

I also met a parent today who stated that with two children in public schools in the area this will put their annual fees bill up by £12,000 per annum – on money that has already been taxed by PAYE and National Insurance. They, like many other parents, are looking to Ireland or English-speaking private schools in Spain for public school education, whilst many will have no option but to request places in schools in West Berkshire or join the queue of parents spending money on private tutoring to hothouse them into the Reading boys and girls grammar schools.

The UK will be one of the few countries in the world to tax private education when it introduces a 20% VAT on fees in January 2025.

West Berkshire has many public schools; what impact will the potential closure of private schools have on the education system and, if known, employment within West Berkshire District and are any steps to mitigate being taken?"

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

Thank you for the question, which I am taking in place of Councillor Heather Codling who is on a course this week.

The impact of the decisions that parents will take as a result of the imposition of VAT on Independent school fees is yet to be fully understood. The policy that the Labour Government are implementing, I think, is entirely wrong and entirely anti aspirational, which tends to be the character of Labour Governments. All of the schools in the district are very good: maintained schools, academies, and private schools.

Currently, in West Berkshire it is anticipated that there will be a sufficient surplus of places to accommodate any additional demand. This position will continue to be monitored so that any further actions that may be required can be identified at the earliest possible opportunity. In relation to the impact on employment, the education system locally faces challenges in recruiting sufficient suitably qualified staff. As such there are opportunities in the wider education sector that any staff displaced may wish to consider, but it is more than sad that that may be a consequence of the policy. The wider impacts of this national policy will become clearer over a period of years and the Council will continue to respond to these positively. For a Government that talks about economic growth, it seems to be doing everything in its power to avoid it, and this is just another measure.

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

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?”*

Councillor Chris Read asked the following supplementary question:

“I am extremely concerned about the future of the two largest employers in my ward, and I ask if the leadership will 1) write to our two MPs on the matter of tax on education and 2) visit the two largest employers in my ward on this matter”.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I would be delighted to do so. you know I have been visiting schools and I will certainly do thank and look forward to seeing them. We will certainly write to our two MPs. Thank you.

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