

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 3 July 2025

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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Lee Allen:

“Given a majority of Newbury residents who responded to the council’s survey (almost 60%) opposed the extension of pedestrian hours in the town centre to 10AM - 11PM from the previous 10AM - 5PM why did the council continue with it?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Mr Allen, thank you for your question.

It is important to stress that the extension to pedestrianisation is a trial, with a more substantive, statutory, and longer-lasting, six-month consultation to ensure we capture residents lived experiences to ensure that a reasoned and balanced decision is made following this trial.

This was a manifesto commitment and is supported by Newbury Town council, and it was considered that there was enough support to conduct the trial and a more substantive consultation which will help us inform that longer term decision making going forward, as well as other metrics

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?”*

Lee Allen asked the following supplementary question:

“How will the council dictate whether or not the trial has been a success?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

There are many metrics as discussed that we will look at across the trial period in things like footfall, dwell time, as well as consultation responses, both the quantitative ones and also the qualitative ones that we asked for at the time of that consultation. So, there will be a well-rounded decision-making process in this, and as I'm keen to hear those kinds of lived experiences of residents and businesses and visitors, that make the most of the extended pedestrianisation.

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Paul Morgan:

“On 11 June 2025 I received an email from the Council advising me of “Changes to Garden Waste subscription pricing for 2025/26” which informed me that “instead of a flat fee for the first bin, the charge will now be based on your property’s Council Tax band”. Based on the total number of subscribers staying the same can you please provide the calculations undertaken by the Council and total revenue received / anticipated for

- i) the existing flat fee arrangements (i.e. total number of households / subscribers x £55.00) and*
- ii) ii) the new variable fee based on the property Tax bands (A @ £40 through to H @ £75)”*

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for your question.

As you correctly noted, the Council has moved from a flat-rate fee to a variable charge based on Council Tax bands. This change was approved as part of the Council's 2025/26 revenue budget and published in the Fees and Charges Schedule.

In response to your request for calculations:

i) Under a flat fee arrangement:

- The total number of subscribing households was 34,423
- At a flat fee of £55 per household, the total revenue generated would be: 34,423 x £55 = £1,893,126.5

ii) Under a variable fee structure based on Council Tax bands:

- Assuming the same number of subscribers, the total anticipated revenue is based on the distribution of subscribers across Council Tax bands A to H, with charges ranging from £40 to £75.
- The total projected revenue under this model is: £1,994,410

It is also important to note that, even at the highest price band, the Council's garden waste subscription service remains competitively priced when compared with the flat rate charged by neighbouring authorities, many of which are above £80.

And it's also really important to note, that with this model, 55% of subscribers will be paying less than when we came to power in 2023. Sorry for the, the amount of words there, but I hope I've answered that question.

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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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“I would like to commend you on your transparency because you've answered the question, so I applaud you for doing that. So, thank you very much for doing that. So basically, you are looking at £100,000 more. I would be curious to see what band I'm in to see if my band is paying more than everyone else. So, if you have that information, that would be useful.

In terms of the accounts which are due out now, which the public can come and have a look at, does this revenue show as income on your accounts?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

If you let me know what band you're in, I would be happy to answer that question. It will show as a saving. Local authorities are not here to make profit. We are here to serve residents, so it is reflected as a saving, I believe, rather than income.

Shannon Coleman-Slaughter, s151 Officer, commented:

In the accounts which is different to our budget proposals, it would be shown in the net cost of service as income.

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Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:

“Please can you confirm that the revised / updated Playing Pitch Strategy is still on schedule to be issued / published within the next month or two.”

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

Thank you for your question, Mr Pearce,

I am very pleased to say the draft Playing Pitch Strategy is on track to be completed in early August 2025. Subject to approval through the Council's governance procedures, the draft strategy will proceed to a period of public consultation, during which resident views will be sought to inform the final version.

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

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Now that a new Local Plan has been issued, how will the Playing Pitch Strategy be managed and updated to reflect the increased demand that massive new housing schemes will bring?”

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

I think we would have to wait first of all, until the Playing Pitch Strategy review is published, and the refresh is published, and obviously as we go forward, that will inform the answer to your question. At the moment I cannot give that because it is speculative at this stage.

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Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:

“Regarding the extended pedestrianisation. I believe the objective was to increase footfall and help local restaurants and bars. What modelling was done to see if there was a likely positive financial outcome?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Mr Gotelee, thank you for your question.

Pedestrianisation is known to have a positive impact on the local economy by increasing footfall and consumer spending. There is plenty of overarching evidence that suggests a net benefit for businesses and the overall vitality of an area. The Council will, of course, measure and compare footfall and vehicular traffic flows around the town centre. We will also have access to other key economic data such as dwell time. This is the amount of time shoppers spend in the town centre and increased dwell time is a direct correlation to increased spending.

Early analysis of these metrics, comparing current trends with same time last year shows positive improvement:

- Newbury Town Centre footfall rose +2.1% year-on-year, exceeding the UK average (+1.8%).
- Northbrook Street saw a +12.55% increase, while Market Place jumped +35% — the highest rise in Newbury.
- Dwell time is up 10%, and there's been a notable rise in tourists and workers visiting the area.

We will also continue to work with the Newbury Business Improvement District to encourage businesses taking advantage of these extended pedestrianisation hours. I will also use this to shamelessly plug their event this evening where we are encouraging extended trading hours and supporting the late night shopping initiative, which is shop until 7:00pm and dining until late, and both of these are taking place this evening, so if you want to pop out for some shopping, you've still got time. The second one will take place on the 7th of August, and I hope that answers your question, but we will continue to monitor this throughout the trial.

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?”*



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John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

"I might nip out for a meal afterwards, but, have no fun for shopping. You did not really quite answer whether any modelling was done beforehand, but what I am wondering is that since there is a lot of negative press, we have had people on the television, restauraners saying their business is going down. If it turns out to be a disaster, will you actually consider the obvious, which is to reduce pedestrianisation?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

In terms of reducing it, do you mean back to 5:00pm or reducing it completely, because if the answer is reducing it overall back beyond the original 5:00pm then no. I think we have demonstrated this evening that there are positive signs. It is early days, I'm not going to say we have solved it. It is delivering everything we need, it has only been a month, but I think those numbers that we demonstrate this evening are positive and we are really looking forward to continuing to work with the BID and businesses to make this a success for everybody.

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Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Lee Allen:

“Why did the council choose to move to a 3 week bin collection despite, 70% of the 5,000 residents who responded to this council’s survey saying they did not want to change from 2 to 3 week bin collection?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Mr Allen, thank you for your question.

We understand that changes to waste collection services can be concerning, and we appreciate the feedback received through the recent survey.

While 70% of respondents expressed that they didn’t believe a change to three weekly black bin collections would increase recycling and reduce waste production. However, this is proven again by other local authorities that have made this change, these things are absolutely delivered by making this change. 52% of residents indicated that they could make this change with support. The decision to move to a three weekly schedule was made following careful consideration of environmental, financial and operational factors, and the council must balance the resident feedback with its responsibility to deliver sustainable services.

In advance of this change we have expanded recycling services to support this transition:

- Weekly food waste collections
- Kerbside recycling of plastic pots, tubs, and trays
- Collection of household batteries on black bin days
- Recycling of coffee pods and vapes at our recycling centres and expanded the number of small electrical item and carton banks across the district.

Analysis still shows that 42% of the waste currently placed in black bins could be recycled using existing kerbside services. Evidence from other councils shows that moving to three-weekly collections leads to higher recycling rates and less overall waste.

I would just add that we recognise that change can be challenging, and we are here to offer support. So, if you have got concerns, please do get in touch.

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?”*



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Lee Allen asked the following supplementary question:

Given that West Berkshire is according to some statistics, in the top 20 waste producing counties in the country, is the council 100% sure that this change will in fact bring the waste down, and bring the county down percentage wise?

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Like I said, there's evidence from other local authorities around the country that have made this change, that this is demonstrably the case. I think it is critical to highlight, and I know residents will have concerns because we produce a lot of waste as a local authority around that capacity. Reducing to three weekly still leaves us in line with our neighbouring Berkshire authorities in terms of weekly capacity. We are still above Labour-led Reading Council, even at fortnightly, they offer less capacity, and they do not even collect glass at the kerbside. So, I am confident that this can be made a success and will deliver on those metrics over time.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon raised a point of order.

Councillor Gourley may have inadvertently misled Mr. Allen. He said that 52% of respondents said they would be able to cope with the change with support. That includes people who said that they 'may' be able to cope with the change with support, which is not the same thing. I wonder if you'd like to clarify that.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The answer to the question is yes with some support which is what the consultation question says with regards to that.

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Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Paul Morgan:

“We are being invited to partake in an engagement exercise with respect to ‘Ridgeway Council’ a proposed new unitary council covering the districts of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and Vale of White Horse. This feels like we are being presented with a “fait accompli” without any reference to or discussion regarding any alternative options. What other options could, should and will be considered?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

Central Government will replace the current two-tier system of local government, which consists of district and county councils, with new unitary authorities. It also wants smaller existing unitary councils, like West Berkshire, to reorganise so they cover areas of around 500,000 people. At present, West Berkshire Council provides services for just over 163,000 residents.

The government wishes for councils to work together on plans for how these new unitary councils will work. As a result, the majority of the Oxfordshire authorities have teamed up with West Berkshire to work together positively and constructively on a proposal that meets the government's criteria, and we feel may also provide an option for a better future for both Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. The proposal - which is one of three being put forward for the area - is for two new unitary councils with the working titles of Oxford and Shires Council and Ridgeway Council. It is a proposal at this stage that we consider would deliver better services while retaining a close link to local communities and aims to create strong, financially stable council that will provide high-quality, cost-effective, and locally driven services.

Many of the towns and villages in the southernmost areas of Oxfordshire were once a part of Berkshire before the last big local government reorganisation of areas in the 1970s. The proposed Ridgeway area would comprise of small-scale towns and rural service centres and would not, for example, be dominated by larger towns such as Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell. So, it kind of feels like there are not many other options to consider. What we are extremely keen to avoid, is a situation where we end up being asked to do something, or being told to do something by central government, which is not in our residents' interest, and that is the driving factor behind West Berkshire Council being proactive in joining the proposals that are being put forward by Oxfordshire. But we do want to capture people's thoughts, and they will of course come out in the consultation which runs until the 16th of July.



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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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“A lot of what you said there is common knowledge, so thank you for repeating that. My question really is, is it a fait accompli? You have mentioned two unitary councils, one Oxford and Shires, and the other Ridgeway. Oxford and the Shires has got nothing to do with us in West Berkshire, so we have only got one option that we are looking at. So that's the point I'm trying to get across. It does appear to me that this is being driven by self-interest and political considerations rather than looking at other options. For example, did we have a look at merging with maybe someone in Swindon, which is to the west, someone to the east in Reading, or even somewhere in Hampshire, for example? Did we not look at those options? And why, if we didn't, didn't we?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

At the risk of going back over the answer to my initial response Mr. Morgan, the main driver behind the Ridgeway Council is that it ticks a lot of central government's criteria in terms of the proposed population, in terms of the size of the communities that that council will cover, and this is nothing to do with political considerations. It is a question of looking at who our closest neighbours are and trying to find a solution that serves our residents and our businesses and other stakeholders as well. I mean, it is worth pointing out that Swindon is not exactly next door to us. There is a fair distance between us. I do not think anyone can accuse us of not asking for residents' opinions or consulting.

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Item (G)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:

“Regarding resurfacing of London Rd. I noticed many of Volker's men stood around doing nothing while the resurfacing work had been subcontracted to IMJ Ltd. In what way is over manning jobs a good use of taxpayers money?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Mr Gotelee, thank you for your question.

The Council has a contract with Volker Highways to maintain our highways network. The contract was tendered and won by Volker in a highly competitive market, and the contract contains set costs to undertake specific tasks. How Volker resource those tasks is down to them as a responsible and experienced national contractor.

Given your question is aimed at Volker's management of the site, I asked them for a comment and received the following statement:

‘In order to ensure a safe service, it is necessary that each site is sufficiently resourced to prevent incidents occurring. We recognise that at times it can be perceived that the site is over resourced but on a site like London Road with multiple access points along its length it is important to make sure that the site is as safe as possible with the least disruption to residents, businesses and the travelling public while we carry out these essential works.

The resource engaged on site is there to ensure that vehicular traffic does not incorrectly enter the working space and pedestrians also have a safe passage through the works’

It is also important to highlight that I was at the road traffic safety partnership with the PCC (the Police Crime Commissioner) a couple of weeks ago and actually vehicular ingress into roadworks has seen a significant rise so it is really important that that our contractors and our supply partners protect their employees and members of the public.

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:

Unfortunately, I think you've given the answer that Volker's would have expected. There are loads of times when I have seen them, in fact, every time when I have seen

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them, it just seems so overmanned, it looks like it is just giving them a blank cheque for work”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Again, I will reiterate the point that we pay a flat fee for these services based on specific tasks. You know, highways work is a very specific task that we employ them for. And quite frankly, I would hope that a worker returning home at the end of the shift is as important and ultimately that's priceless. I am not a highways engineer, but I do work in infrastructure, and I do know that safety is the number one priority when working out on site. Volker are the experts, so I'm going to bow to their judgement on this one, but it is not a blank cheque.

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Item (H)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Paul Morgan:

"My question relates to Agenda Item 6 and 7. The council has borrowed £70 Million from the PWLB in FY 2024/25 and used £13 Million from the EFS. What additional loans / funding is forecast to be required (and from what Sources) in FY 2025/26."

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

During 2024/25 the Council borrowed £45 million from the PWLB, EFS is not additional to this sum. For 2025/26 the Council expects to borrow approximately £95 million, this will not be necessarily from PWLB as the treasury team assesses the most cost-effective form of borrowing as and when borrowing is required. The sources of funding which are approved sources are detailed in the council's annual Investment & Borrowing Strategy which is approved by Council and published as part of the annual budget papers.

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?"*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

"I listened to the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, and it's very informative actually, so I now understand, and I think everyone else should understand that the EFS is not a loan. Basically, it allows the council to actually use what you have for capital into revenue. So, £45 million is not what you borrowed from the PWLB, but I have got records from the PWLB themselves from their website that say you borrowed £70 million. I have got a breakdown here of that figure. I can share that with you. So, it is £70 million that you have borrowed, and the interest rates on that is about £4 million pounds."

Shannon Coleman-Slaughter, s151 Officer, commented:

It is not a figure I recognise. I would have to have a look at that paperwork if you wish to submit it, I will have a look at it. My understanding is we borrowed £45 million and then we had additional sums from local authority borrowing, so we did do a combination. So, I recognise the sum, as in what was borrowed, but not necessarily from the PWLB. So, if you would like to submit that, I will have a look.

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

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It is a concern that we are looking at different figures here because that £70 million creates a huge amount of interest in the short term. My supplementary question is out of the £70 million that you borrowed....

The Leader of the Council interjected:

£45 million is the figure we recognise as we sit here, please.

Paul Morgan continued:

“Out of the £45 million or £70 million that you borrowed, how much of that is left? Have you got any of it left and where, and how is that being used?”

The Portfolio for Finance and Resources answered:

Thank you for your supplementary questions. So as part of our governance strategy regarding Treasury Management we have a minimum of roughly £10 million I suppose for working capital cover as part of our strategy. So, at any moment in time, we will have a minimum balance of £10 million to help us, almost like a rainy-day fund. We will not be borrowing money for the sake of it, for just putting on deposit because obviously the money which we receive will be less interest rate than the interest rate which we pay.

(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Does the administration agree with the comments made during the Extraordinary Council meeting by the Executive Member for Transformation that Conservative councillors selected sites for inclusion in the Local Plan because they were in “Liberal Democrat” areas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Mackinnon. Firstly, let me correct your quoted question. What Councillor Poole actually said was ‘often favouring’. Now maybe it would have been more prudent to say ‘often appearing to favour’, but let’s look at it from a layman’s perspective for a moment.

Newbury held Liberal Democrat seats on both town and district councils. Recent developments are Sandleford East, Sandleford West, Lapwing, Donnington Valley, South Newbury. Theale was Lib Dem for over 20 years, two large new developments. Thatcham, Lib Dem on both town and district, and re-confirmed in the recent by-election, the biggest development programme across that area and 2,500 houses in a greenfield site in a recent plan which I would reiterate we had no choice in adopting.

Now let’s look at the historically strong Conservative areas. Lambourn, Downlands, Great Shefford, Upper Bucklebury. I don’t recall any new developments in those areas, despite the benefits that small pockets of development would bring by injecting vibrancy and viability to those villages. However, I am certainly not saying that anyone chose the areas mentioned for development along political lines.

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:

“So, it sounded like you were doubling down there until the very end when you said you wouldn’t possibly dream of suggesting so. Given that you said the wording that Councillor Poole used was ‘favoured’ rather than ‘appeared to favour’, do you agree with her comments that we favoured those sites?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

As I’ve just said, she should have said ‘often favouring’.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented:

Oh, that’s worse.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I beg your pardon, ‘often appearing to favour’.

I’ve just read out to you, Newbury, Theale, Thatcham, Councillor Ross Mackinnon. When the Plan was started, they were not all Liberal Democrat. There would not have

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been 2,500 houses, in the original Plan. If there were not enough houses in the original Plan, that went through to the Inspector, then why would he add the 1,000 additional houses

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"A small charity in my ward is being charged double council tax on two cottages while they are unoccupied. This is a heavy burden that cannot be sustained. What can Council do to support this and other charities who find themselves in a similar situation?"

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

An empty property owned by a charity may be exempt from council tax for up to six months from the date that the last resident vacated, provided that the property was being used for the purposes of the charity up to the date the last occupier moved out.

After six months the full charge is due.

Where a property has been empty for more than 1 year but less than 5, an additional premium of 100% can be added to the Council Tax bill.

Where a property has been empty for between 5 and 10 years, then a 200% premium can be applied and for those properties which have been empty for more than 10 years a 300% premium can be added to the bill.

The government has set out some exceptions to the premium charge. However, these exceptions are not specifically for charities.

However, one of the aims of the national policy is to ensure properties are in use. We are committed to relieve homelessness and provide affordable housing, within West Berkshire, or a fairer West Berkshire for opportunities for all. So, we will be approaching the organisation to see whether we can support them in bringing the properties back into use

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:

"If you will forgive me Chairman, I would just like to set the scene here. It is a small charity with a turnover of £24,000 per year. They have a small number of properties in Aldermaston, which is a protected area. They have a couple of cottages that they want to combine into one because as two cottages, they don't meet modern needs. Elderly people benefit from these alms houses, and I think we would all agree that the Council are very grateful to those sorts of charities because they are addressing an important need. They put it in a planning application which failed because they are listed buildings. The properties have been empty for a year and they are having to pay

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council tax. It is nothing to do with them. They are trying to do the right thing, but they are being caned on council tax.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

My understanding, rightly or wrongly, is if there has been a delay because of planning, that potentially gives us an exception. We have discussed this. We can't obviously give exceptions for the sake of it because everyone will be asking for an exception, but I think when there is a circumstance where planning is in situ, which has then caused you to go into this period, they may well be able to qualify.

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Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Would the selection of sites for inclusion in the Local Plan based on the voting patterns of the electorate rather than on planning considerations amount to misconduct in public office?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

The Council set out its Site Selection Methodology dated January 2023 https://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/54005/Site-Selection-Methodology-January-2023/pdf/Site_Selection_Methodology_January_2023.pdf?m=1736958989667 this is based on the guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). Key considerations for site selection include the need to meet housing targets, protect the environment (including the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and prevent flooding), and support economic growth.

Public Consultation is an important aspect of the Local Plan process however consultation/public opinion must be balanced with planning considerations such as housing need and environmental factors (including statutory considerations).

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:

“I think you may have answered a slightly different question to the one that's on the screen. So, this question was referring to Councillor Poole's accusation that Conservative Councillors selected sites based on them being in Liberal Democrat areas. I'm asking you whether if that was the case, it would be misconduct in public office. I wasn't asking for a list of criteria that should be.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

No, that's the answer I have had from Legal.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented:

I do not like that answer.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

While decisions made during a public consultation may give rise to concerns, whether they amount to misconduct in public office depends heavily on the specific facts and circumstances involved. It is important to note that the Local Plan Examiner offers an

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independent and impartial review of the Local Plan process ensuring compliance with the relevant legal and procedural standards.

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Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“When applications for major developments in AWE’s DEPZ are approved, conditions relating to emergency planning are usually imposed. What responsibility does Council have to ensure such conditions are complied with?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

The council has a variety of powers to secure compliance with planning conditions where it is considered expedient to do so. Breaches of planning conditions are investigated by planning enforcement officers in accordance with the prioritisation set out within the Council’s Enforcement Plan which aims to ensure that high risk cases, with the potential for significant or irreversible harm/impact on the environment or local community are prioritised for investigation.

It is not always necessary to instigate formal enforcement action and some breaches can be resolved through negotiated compliance, for example, through submission of the necessary information to the Council for approval.

The safety of our residents and occupants within the emergency planning zones is of paramount importance and where conditions relate to the effective operation of emergency planning, this will be a significant factor when prioritising investigations and considering expediency of enforcement action. In addition, the Enforcement Plan is in the process of being refreshed and will set out our more specifically our approach to breaches within the detailed emergency planning zones of both AWE sites.

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:

“I wasn't quite expecting such a wide-ranging response. I thought you might have answered my question around breaches of the conditions imposed upon planning applications in DPZ because there's a considerable amount of development going on to the south of Aldermaston, and frankly, conditions are not being met. Now, the consequence of that potentially is that in an emergency, there could be significant harm done to the residents and people working in the area. Right now, nobody is tracking this. Nobody in the Council. Neither emergency planning nor planning enforcement track this, and it needs to be.”

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

The Leader of the Council answered:

That is a big statement, that nobody is tracking it, and I would like to just get the Executive Director to address that point, please.

Clare Lawrence, Executive Director – Place commented:

In terms of planning enforcement, we don't have the resources to track compliance with all conditions. However, if we are aware of any breaches or potential breaches, we will investigate those, and we do rely on residents, on town and parish council and our members to bring that to our attention. So, if you have examples, please let us have those.

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Does the administration consider that planning officers employed by the Council between 2019-23 were complicit in the selection of sites for the Local Plan based on voting patterns of the electorate?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I am very disappointed, but not particularly surprised that the Conservative opposition have chosen to bring our hardworking and dedicated officers into this affray. Members make decisions on policy, not officers. Officers recommend, advise, assist and ensure any decisions made are legal. They do not make policy, but they do enact decisions that we make. I would imagine that those officers involved in the Local Plan are quite offended by this question and its implied slight.

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:

“I find that answer remarkably incredible. It was your Executive Member for Transformation who cast these officers’ integrity into doubt when she said that sites were selected based on the political makeup of those sites. Rather than pretending to be offended, how about a yes or no answer to the question?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I'm not going to give a yes or no answer to the question. I've given you the answer to that question. No, planning officers were not complicit.

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

Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 3 July 2025
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(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Why has the Council not published details of expenses paid to Councillors since the Liberal Democrats took office?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. This has been an oversight with information last published in 2021/22. The final year of the previous Conservative administration expenses were also not published until highlighted by your question. We have now rectified this with all the up to-date information. I have double checked on the internet, where it can be found under [Councillors' Allowances and Expenses](#), and it is all there, up to date and makes for interesting reading.

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:

“Can I ask when the expenses for the year 2024/25 will be published if they haven't been already?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

They are published.
