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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

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

"Government-funded plans for the multi-billion pounds Future Materials Campus (FMC) at AWE's Aldermaston site will see planning applications coming forward soon.

How will the council support and engage constructively with residents, local councils and businesses on this enormous development?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Before answering, I want to define the Future Material Campus; it is the renewal of the existing facilities, manufacture of nuclear components, storage of material, improved science and analysis capabilities and new nuclear material recoverability capabilities.

The Council is currently engaged in pre-application discussions with AWE under the terms of a Planning Performance Agreement.

The new NPPF says proposals for major development should be informed by early engagement with neighbours and the local community, as well as with the local planning authority, statutory consultees, infrastructure providers, and other relevant bodies where appropriate, where appropriate. This pre-application engagement should be proportionate to the nature of the proposal and those likely to be affected by it.

It is for the applicant to undertake pre-application engagement. For the FMC project Planning Officers were invited by AWE to attend on behalf, of the Local Planning Authority, four public engagement events arranged and organised by AWE in the summer. Residents, businesses, local ward members, and local parish councils were also invited.

AWE also has a local liaison committee that includes local parish and district/borough councils, which is also attended by the ONR and Environment Agency.

The application is expected to be accompanied by a Statement of Community Involvement that details the public engagement and identifies how the proposals have addressed these where appropriate.

When a planning application is received, consultation and publicity will also take place in accordance with the normal requirements of the legislation and council policy.

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?"*

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

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"As a Member of the LLC, I know what they are telling the Councils and it is very high level. What engagement will West Berkshire have with the community, because, of course, it will be the Council who assess and determines the applications when they come forward later this year. I would expect the Council to directly consult the Parish Councils and local community".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

As this is currently in the pre-application stage, there is currently no need to do that. Pre-applications are a confidential process between the applicant and the Council, so at this stage no. In the future, yes, and we expect a statement of community involvement.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Does the Executive Member regard borrowing tens of millions of pounds simply to support day-to-day expenditure as a sustainable financial strategy for West Berkshire?"

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Thank you for your question.

Yes, I agree, it is not a sustainable financial strategy for central government to force 35 local authorities, including West Berkshire, by their unfair funding formula to borrow up to £1.5bn this financial year to fund day to day expenditure.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

"What's concerning is the ongoing impact of this. You must be looking at how you are going to finance the repayment of this debt".

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

We have had an extensive week of looking at budgets. One of the things we are looking at are the choices we have, of either becoming the party of austerity (which has not worked) and cut everything to the bare minimum, or we make sure we fund the services which the residents want and ensure West Berkshire continues to be a great place to live. We are looking to make sure we support those services with funding through Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"AWE have compared the scale and complexity of the proposed FMC development with London 2012.

What specific assurance can the lead member give that Council has sufficient planning, emergency planning and other relevant technical resources and expertise to undertake a thorough assessment of the application, including its implications for residential safety, emergency preparedness and amenity within and around the Aldermaston DEPZ?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

We take the safety of both residents and AWE very seriously, so that is a given.

The pre-application engagement and anticipated planning application are being managed through the agreed Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). A PPA is a voluntary agreement that sets out a clear timetable and process for handling a major or complex planning application, helping all parties work together towards a timely decision. It can also enable the recovery of costs associated with managing the application, helping to ensure sufficient planning and specialist resources are available to support an efficient decision-making process. We do get some costs back from doing a PPA.

As with any planning application, the proposal will be assessed on behalf of the Council by a team of qualified professionals to ensure that all relevant technical, environmental, and specialist matters are considered and independently evaluated. This assessment may be undertaken by in-house specialists or, where appropriate, by externally appointed consultants with relevant expertise. The application will also be overseen by the Council's Strategic Developments Planning Lead given its significance.

The process will include consultation and engagement with the Council's Emergency Planning Service and the Office for Nuclear Regulation in relation to matters of emergency preparedness and public safety. Public amenity is an ordinary planning consideration within the expertise of planners but will be supported where necessary by consultation with relevant experts, for example the Highways Authority with regard to anticipated traffic generation and routing during construction.

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"My concern, and that of the community, is the scale of the project. Everyone understands the importance of it in relation to national security, and no one wants to obstruct the process. People are concerned about the impact the project will have on their lives. I am encouraged by your response about the need for technical expertise, but I want assurance that the planning service will act quickly to ensure internal and external resources are made available".

The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) answered:

I can give you that assurance and take personal responsibility to keep and eye on that application.

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(D) As Councillor Dominic Boeck was satisfied with the response given to Question C, he withdrew submitted Question D.

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

Question (E)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What evidence will the Council publish to demonstrate whether its new Planning Enforcement Plan is improving the speed and effectiveness of planning enforcement?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

The revised Planning Enforcement Plan introduced a new prioritisation framework designed to ensure that cases with the greatest potential harm are investigated most quickly. Because enforcement cases vary significantly in their complexity and the route to resolution, the most meaningful measure of speed is the time taken to investigate a complaint and complete an initial assessment. This is a commonly used performance measure across planning authorities.

Measuring effectiveness is more complex and cannot be demonstrated through a single statistic. A significant proportion of investigations conclude that no breach of planning control has occurred, in which case the appropriate outcome is to close the case with no further action.

Where a breach is identified, outcomes may include determining that formal action is not expedient, securing a voluntary resolution, or, where necessary, taking formal enforcement action.

The Council is therefore looking to publish a range of performance indicators, including response times, investigation outcomes, and the use of formal enforcement powers. Officers are currently exploring the most effective way of presenting this information so that performance can be monitored transparently over time.

While the revised plan has only been in operation for several months, the early results are encouraging. Average response times for Priorities 1 to 3 and within target.

The Council has also used its formal enforcement powers where appropriate during the current financial year, including serving:

- 6 Enforcement Notices
- 3 Temporary Stop Notices
- 21 Planning Contravention Notices

In addition, the Council successfully secured the continuation of an injunction at Aldermaston following an extended High Court trial and recently obtained a further interim injunction relating to a site in Tidmarsh. These cases have required substantial

officer time and demonstrate the Council's willingness to take robust action where serious planning harm is identified.
Taken together, these measures will provide a broader picture of both the speed and effectiveness of the planning enforcement service than any single performance indicator alone.
I would add that, on our member planning portal, there is a form about enforcement. It is not highly detailed, but it does provide an indication about the things being monitored.

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 did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (F)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What measures will the Council publish to enable members and residents to judge whether its SEND reforms are improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

We want families, residents, and Members to feel confident that our plans for SEND are clear, joined up and focused on what really matters. Once our Reforms Plan has been approved by the DfE and following the mid-point review of our SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024–29, we will bring both plans together into a single document. We will also publish a high-level action plan so that everyone can easily see what we want to achieve and how we will measure progress.

Being open about the differences these reforms are making is very important. The action plan will include clear measurable targets and regular evaluation of progress, including with parents and carers involved along the way – I know that the DfE will be watching. This will help us understand whether the programme is offering good value for money and most importantly, whether it is making a real and positive difference to the experiences, opportunities, and outcomes of children and young people with SEND and their families.

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 did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (G)	Council Meeting on 15 October 2026

(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What is the Council doing to ensure that residents of rural communities have equitable access to library services?"

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

West Berkshire Libraries is committed to ensuring that residents in rural communities have equitable access to library services through a combination of library buildings, digital services, outreach activities, home delivery services and partnership working with local communities.

Library services remain available to all residents through the district's network of libraries, while the eLibrary service provides 24/7 access to e-books, e-audiobooks, newspapers, magazines, and other online resources through BorrowBox. The library service also supports digital inclusion through free Wi-Fi, public computers, digital skills support, and access to the National Databank.

Following the closure of the mobile library service, West Berkshire Libraries developed a more flexible service model to meet the needs of rural communities. Working in partnership with parish councils, pop-up libraries were introduced in Basildon, Compton and Leckhampstead during 2025, with further locations established in Aldworth, Speen and Shaw-cum-Donnington in 2026. Discussions continue with other parish councils about introducing additional sessions in their communities. These pop-up libraries provide access to current library stock, reservations, reading recommendations, digital support, and information about other Council services. They have proved popular, attracting new users and enabling residents to access library services closer to home.

Residents unable to travel to a library due to age, disability, caring responsibilities or transport difficulties, can request the At Home Library Service. Through a team of DBS-checked volunteers, books and other library materials are delivered directly to residents' homes, ensuring that those who are housebound can continue to access and benefit from library services.

The service has also introduced a Children's Community Bookshelf in Basildon, providing local families with convenient access to a regularly refreshed collection of books within their own community. Community bookshelves, alongside pop-up libraries and other outreach services, form part of the package of support available to town and parish councils.

In addition, library bookshelves have been introduced at leisure centres, including Kennet, Thatcham, Cotswold, Willink, and Burghfield. These provide easy access to

books for residents and help raise awareness of library membership, encouraging people to sign up for a library card and make use of the wide range of free online resources available through the eLibrary if they are unable to visit a library regularly. This is very helpful for parents use whist their children are doing activities.

Library staff also undertake outreach visits to community venues, care, and retirement settings, including Gilbert Court and locations in Kintbury, helping residents access books, reading opportunities and library services closer to where they live. Staff attend community events, coffee mornings, family activities, and other local venues to promote services and engage with residents who may not otherwise use the library service.

The Council continues to work closely with town and parish councils, Public Health, Family Services, and community organisations to identify local needs and develop services that best support rural residents. Through this combination of physical library provision, digital access, community-based services, outreach activities and home delivery, West Berkshire Libraries aims to ensure that all residents can access a comprehensive and efficient library service, regardless of where they live in the district.

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:

"Would you agree to undertake a ward level survey of access? My concern is rural residents who suffer digital isolation".

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

I will talk to my team and try to get that information for you.