

Executive Meeting

21 July 2011

Questions and Answers



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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

(a) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operational), ICT and Customer Services by Mr Richard Garvie:

“Noting that the priority for highways should be resurfacing and improving accident blackspot areas and at a time when the Lib Dems are calling for more money to be spent in these areas, can the member for highways assure the residents who use Pound Lane bus stop and service 102 that no alterations will be made at the Lower Way / A4 junction that will result in the loss of their bus services?”

Mr Richard Garvie withdrew his question.

(b) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Environment, ‘Cleaner Greener, Public Protection, Culture and Leisure by Mr Richard Garvie::

“With regards to the proposed incinerator at Chieveley, could Cllr Hillary Cole please advise whether AONB designation offers sufficient protection against developments such as the proposed incinerator?”

The Executive Member for Environment, ‘Cleaner Greener, Public Protection, Culture and Leisure answered:

Yes, PPS7 states that the AONB should be given great weight in development control decisions and that major development, which a proposed incinerator would be, should only take place in exceptional circumstances.

The Executive Member for Environment, ‘Cleaner Greener, Public Protection, Culture and Leisure 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?”*

Mr Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

“Given the close relationship between this Council and our MP, has the Council discussed with our MP about raising the matter in the House of Commons, like other junior ministers and shadow ministers have been free to do. Obviously his reason for not raising our case in the House of Commons was on the basis that he is junior minister, but some of his colleagues in the same situation have raised their plight. Can the Council not put pressure on our MP to do the same?”

The Executive Member for Environment, ‘Cleaner Greener, Public Protection, Culture and Leisure answered:

Our MP is extremely supportive of the opposition to the incinerator. He has been to several events and meetings with regard to the incinerator action group, which have had road shows throughout the District locally, and I think at the moment, because we are not in receipt of a planning application, it would be inappropriate for him to raise it because we may never see a planning application Mr Garvie, but the hope is that the amount of interest that has been raised by this, both in the local and national media, will make the applicant think again.

(c) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Finance, Property, Health and Safety by Mr Richard Garvie:

“At a time when council employees are losing jobs and services continue to be reduced to meet the challenging funding reductions from central Government, could the member for finance assure taxpayers that no council funds will be allocated to non essential projects such as the Wharf Redevelopment and that such projects must be 100% self funding?”

The Leader said: Councillor Chopping is absent, but he will send you a written response.

Written response set out below:

Dear Mr Garvie

Question to Executive –21 July 2011

Thank you for the question submitted to me for the Executive meeting on 21 July 2011.

I can confirm that the Council has consistently said that no Council funds, other than those already spent on consultation, will be used to support the Wharf Development which forms part of the Newbury 2025 Vision. That position has not changed.

Yours sincerely

Keith Chopping
Member for Sulhamstead Ward
Executive Member for Finance, Property and Health and Safety
West Berkshire Council

(d) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development by Mr Richard Garvie:

“With electric trains proposed to be introduced between Newbury and Paddington in the coming years and the "Thames Turbo" fleet being removed from the Great Western franchise, what action is the council taking at this point to ensure that regular rail services to and from Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn continue despite the lack of electrification to those stations?”

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development answered:

The Council responds to all consultations with both Network Rail and First Great Western and also holds regular meetings with both companies and it should be remembered that this Council successfully lobbied for the electrification to extend to Newbury instead of finishing at Reading, as was originally proposed, and will continue to lobby for it to be extended to Bedwyn.

Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development:

“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?”

Mr Garvie did not ask a supplementary question.

(e) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Strategy, Performance, Community Safety by Mr Richard Garvie:

“Throughout the process of the CCTV transfer, I was very clear that I support the aims of saving money and improving the services and I am pleased that the council are achieving these aims despite misguided quotes that the council had wasted money on this project. Could Cllr Stansfeld provide an update as to how many cameras of the 40 that are being retained are now in operation (no locations required) and when the project is expected to be completed?”

The Executive Member for Strategy, Performance, Community Safety answered:

The CCTV system has now been up and operational for a number of weeks. Of the 40 cameras, 39 are up and working. We have one camera that is not operational because of an underground major wiring cabling problem and we'll be moving this to another location at an appropriate moment.

On a day to day basis we do obviously expect the odd unserviceability, but it is only on a day to day basis, or there is occasionally routine maintenance, but the system is proving reliable and, like most digital systems, is proving more reliable than the analogue system which it replaced.

The Executive Member for Strategy, Performance, Community Safety 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?”*

Mr Garvie said: Not directly out of the answer no, thank you.

(f) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service by Mr Richard Garvie:

“With two of our schools becoming academies and with others expected to follow later, could the member for education advise as to the extent of financial challenges this will present in terms of reduced education funding to the LA and how much (if any) remaining LA controlled school budgets are expected to fall in the next financial year (by percentage)?”

The Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service answered:

The Secretary of State for Education has made it clear that academies will be funded at the same level as other LA maintained schools.

This basically consists of direct funding from the YPLA, that's the Young People's Learning Agency, equivalent to the school's normal formula allocation, plus an additional sum to cover the cost of LA central services which other schools receive as part of their free services.

The Government are currently consulting on how this sum should be calculated, so it is likely to change from 2012/13.

At the moment however, the total sum allocated to academies from central DSG is around £208,000. But some, though not all, would have been spent on these schools anyhow.

The Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service 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?”*

Mr Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes. Obviously, since I wrote this question, there is now potentially a third secondary school becoming an Academy. What services, again Chair you can say if it’s not relevant, what services will the Academy schools be buying centrally from the Local Authority and do you know what services they will be?”

The Executive Member for Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service answered:

It’s varying from one Academy to another. We have actually produced a booklet listing the services that they can buy back from us and they can pick and choose from that list.

Mr Garvie asked: *“But at this stage they haven’t given you an indication of which ones they would take?”*

The Executive Member for Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service answered:

We have had some indications. Some have already been bought back for a year, but obviously they’re not all doing exactly the same thing. It’s out of that book that they would pick what they want to buy.

(g) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service by Mr Alexander Payton:

“The designated schools for the Newbury Racecourse development are Park House and The Willows - both of them involving either a long and steep climb (relative to other nearby schools) or a car journey through the congested road junctions around Stroud Green or Hambridge Road and A339. How does the Executive Member for Children and Young People reconcile this with the need to encourage sustainable travel, in which the school run plays a key role?”

The Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service answered:

I must say I was rather surprised by this question at a time when we are encouraging children to be healthy and get exercise by walking or cycling to school, and this is supported by the Healthy Schools Initiative and School Travel Plans.

However, you are correct in identifying Park House and The Willows as the catchment area schools for the Newbury Racecourse and I can confirm that both schools are within the relevant age statutory walking distance and have the ability to be extended to accommodate any additional pupils.

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?”*

Mr Payton asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes please Chairman. I am much obliged for the reassurance that the Council is looking at sustainable transport. In the real world children are unlikely to want to bicycle or walk up the hill every morning to get to Park House from the Racecourse development. Will you now reconsider altering the catchment areas in order to convey the likely impact on the residents of the development.”

The Executive Member for Children and Young People, Youth Service answered:

Well, we are constantly reviewing catchment areas. We're undertaking a primary place review in Newbury and this will look at the demography, school capacity and catchment areas, so all of that is constantly under review and it's particularly under review at this point in time.

(h) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development by Mr Sam Dibas:

"In a local radio interview on 9th July, the Executive Member for Planning said, when asked if the decision to include Sandleford, as well as Newbury Racecourse, in the Core Strategy as a strategic site was 'difficult' that it was 'complex'. In the light of the Inspector's demand for a single document explaining the reasoning behind this decision, how will the Executive Member now set out what those reasons are in a way that isn't complex and which might reassure residents of South Newbury and Greenham that the local infrastructure is not going to be completely overwhelmed?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development answered:

I was very pleased to get this question because it actually proves that someone actually listened to my radio interview.

I'd like to clarify a point in your question. The Inspector has **not** requested a single document explaining the reasoning behind the decision to include Sandleford as well as Newbury Racecourse. What the Inspector has done is he's raised an issue relating to how the decision to choose Sandleford instead of north Newbury as a location for strategic development is explained within a document called the Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment. We call that the SA for short. The Council proposes to remedy this by republishing this part of the SA with a greater level of detail set out within it to provide additional clarity.

This approach from the Council will be reviewed by the Inspector at the end of August.

With regards to your point about infrastructure: the infrastructure needed to deliver development across the District has been assessed by the Council and by other service providers. This was published in the form of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan as part of the Core Strategy which sets out what is needed as well as the locations, timescales and costings. You can view that document on the Council's web site.

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development 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?"*

Mr Dibas asked the following supplementary question:

"Yes I have a supplementary. Looking at the rankings of the sites you have, Sandleford scored at the bottom when in 2009 there was an ranking for the development and the racecourse came on the top. Looking at, just from now, the building of houses on the racecourse and the pressure is going to fall on the south, as a member of the public, and a lot of people in the public were showing concern of this mass build in the south, would you consider taking Sandleford out of your planning, just looking at our infrastructure and the concern that the public has?"

The Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development answered:

The short answer to the second point in that supplementary is no, and Sandleford has in principle been accepted by the Inspector. He has not queried at all our selection of Sandleford. All he has done is queried the presentation of the process by which we selected it. He has asked for clarification on that.

The sustainability scoring you referred to back in 2009 was a very early stage. Subsequent to that there's been landscape assessments done, there have also been assessments as to how suitable the various sites were to deliver the total vision in context of the plan which, if you will remember (has always been) we were going to be focusing on urban and near urban areas, so when we took all of those extra considerations into account then Sandleford went up the criteria compared to the likes of north Newbury. We explained that properly by the way, in several documents, but he felt that some of those documents appeared after the actual submission and there was a ruling in Newmarket on a similar Core Strategy and apparently we failed to just follow detailed European legislation and regulation. We've got to go back and ensure that we can cover that European law off and we'll be making proposals on how to do that once, as I said, this approach will be reviewed by the Inspector at the end of August.

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

NOTE: Due to a technical problem the answers to the Members' questions were not record.

(a) Question to be answered by the Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development submitted by Councillor Tony Vickers:

"In the Inspector's Agenda for the resumed Core Strategy hearing on 30th June, he suggested that all projected B Class (employment) needs can be more than adequately met from within existing employment land through to 2026, mainly because the Council's own estimate of B1 (office) floorspace required has been reduced by a factor of nearly five. Why therefore is the advice from our planning policy officers, for example on the Travis Perkins site in Mill Lane Newbury - already surrounded by housing - to refuse planning applications for predominantly housing on vacant employment land, even when there is as much employment proposed as there was before?"

(b) Question to be answered by the Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development submitted by Councillor Tony Vickers:

"What is the latest figure for the cost to this Council of providing accommodation for homeless people in West Berkshire, including costs that are reimbursed by Government?"

(c) Question to be answered by the Leader of the Council submitted by Councillor Julian Swift-Hook:

"It seems that Liberal Democrats have so far been excluded from membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board, despite clear indications before May that this new Board would have representation from both the ruling group and the opposition. Advice from the Department of Health South East Regional Lead for Health and Wellbeing Boards suggests that the broadest possible representation should be included on Health and Wellbeing Boards, including all shades of political opinion, so in light of that advice would the Portfolio Holder for Community Care please comment on how Liberal Democrat representation will be included in future?"

(d) Question to be answered by the Executive Member for Community Care, Pensions, and Insurance submitted by Councillor Julian Swift-Hook:

"In the light of the announcement on 11th June that Southern Cross is now to be broken up and will cease to be a care provider, what plans does the Council have for ensuring the continuing care of West Berkshire service users currently resident in Southern Cross homes?"
