

COUNCIL

15 December 2014

Agenda Item 8

Questions from Members

**Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent
to Meeting**

7. Question from Councillor Maz Hussain to the Leader of the Council

“Could the leader please outline progress to date on the Major Projects being undertaken by this council?”

Response from Councillor R Scott (Leader of the Council)

“This Conservative led council is about regeneration, revitalisation of High Wycombe Town centre and the creation of jobs for the benefit of the whole of our District. Our major projects programme spans both the Council’s role as a development promoter and its work in improving the public realm. It has been a productive time, both in terms of creating a new gateway to Wycombe and in the town centre.

The Handy X Hub – incorporating the new Sports & Leisure Centre, a Waitrose foodstore and a new Coachway Park & Ride – is well underway, having already delivered in the process, a new synthetic turf pitch at John Hampden Grammar school and a superb new Athletics Centre at Little Marlow.

Racing ahead too is the Next development on Cressex Island [and contracts are close to being exchanged for the disposal of the remainder of Cressex Island]. The success of the nearby John Lewis store expansion has led to their applying for planning permission for additional parking, which would bring into beneficial use, derelict land alongside the store. The total value of these major investments is estimated to be approaching £100m and together, they involve the creation of several hundred new jobs.

Although not on so large a scale, projects in the town centre are just as significant. The Council’s intervention in the Old Town (Frogmoor / Church Street area), in acquiring derelict shops, refurbishing and re-letting them on realistic rents, has already helped improve this area, and is continuing. Plans are underway for innovative changes to Frogmoor next year. The ‘street food’ court at Little Market House has proved popular and de-cluttering of the public realm is on-going. In addition, we have completed the new pedestrian crossing across the London Road into the Rye and the significant improvement to the ‘shared space’ project in Pauls Row / St. Mary Street is nearing completion, enhancing this busy pedestrian thoroughfare.

Finally, works to the ‘alternative route’ through the town, via Westbourne Street, will commence in the New Year, along with another major area of transformation – the Hughenden Quarter, where some £70m of investment will result in a new ‘green link’ to Hughenden Park and exceptional new accommodation and facilities for older people.

So there’s a momentum of change that’s been generated by Major Projects and we will continue to work hard for the residents and businesses of this District.”

8. Question from Councillor T Snaith to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability

“I understand that once Planning Approval has been given enforcement is reactive.

There is no policing of the completed development to ensure that conditions imposed are met or statutory authorities have effectively used contributions to minimise damage from the developments

Given the large number of applications we can expect from releasing the reserved sites how can we be more proactive in ensuring compliance and enforcement of planning conditions?"

Response from Councillor N Marshall (Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability)

"Wycombe District Council is strongly committed to the effective enforcement of planning legislation as set out in our 'Enforcement Plan' for the Planning & Sustainability Service.

Most of the compliance investigations undertaken are indeed in response to an enforcement enquiry being made to the Council, and are therefore reactive. This however results in our resources being targeted in areas where someone has a genuine concern that development might not be being constructed as it should.

We are releasing five reserve sites. Over the years many large residential sites have been successfully developed, and so there is no reason to think that this will not be the case with the reserve sites. Large residential sites such as these tend to be developed in phases over a period of time and so are subject to sufficient scrutiny to ensure they are built correctly.

If Members are concerned that any development is not being properly implemented they can of course go onto the Council website and complete an enforcement enquiry form. These concerns will then be fully investigated."

9. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Community

"The Council has had a Community Facilities Strategy in place for some years now. The original scoping document identified that Bowerdean Ward has no community facility or place for meetings.

This remains the case and in the recent update on local facilities it was disappointing to note that no progress has been made by officers despite opportunities being available.

Please can you let me know when officers will be doing work on a Bowerdean resource as it appears that other less disadvantaged areas are being prioritised?"

Response from Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Community)

"We have had considerable success by working in partnership with others having recently seen the completion of the Wycombe Marsh Community Centre in September and with the imminent completion of Desborough Recreation Ground changing rooms in January and then the completion of the Bellfield Community House.

A report recently went to the High Wycombe Town Committee outlining the work underway to deliver new community provision in Totteridge and early work on need in the northern Hughenden quarter. The Town Committee also has a CIL allocation and Community officers will work to deliver the projects identified by the Committee of which I believe you are a member. To my knowledge this project does not have any existing funding nor is it on the Town Committee's CIL programme. There is one postholder who manages these projects and the current vacancy is just being

recruited to - it is also vital that we work with established groups to bring these projects to fruition. Once the new postholder starts I will ask FOR them to make contact with you – however any project will need funding and a strong partnership to deliver it if it is to proceed.”

10. Question from Councillor D Watson to the Cabinet Member for Community

“Could the cabinet member for Community and Housing please advise the current status of the works done and contracts let with regards to the Little Marlow Running Track, what is still to be done and when local residents can look forward to the new facility being fully operational?”

Response from Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Community)

“The athletics track is now complete, apart from the mains electrical supply, which was delayed due to problems SSE encountered in obtaining a wayleave. It is now due to be connected on 18 December 2014. This will also enable new street lights at the road junction to be installed, along with the CCTV and internet provision for the building and commissioning of the gate mechanism. Post completion certification by UK Athletics took time to obtain and full certification will be awarded when minor repositioning of the shot put circle and hammer cage has been completed in early 2015. The facility is currently being used by the two main athletics clubs and full operation is expected from March 2015.”

11. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Community

“Since the abolition of crisis loans from the DWP in April 2013, what options are available for Wycombe residents on housing benefit or low income to secure the one month's rent in advance required to access rental property in the private sector, given that rent in advance is specifically excluded from the Local Emergency Support scheme which replaced crisis loans?”

This question refers specifically to rent in advance, and not the rental deposit which can be covered through the Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme?”

Response from Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Community)

“In the absence of the local emergency support scheme providing rent in advance, residents can utilise the services of the credit union in Wycombe.

Residents already in receipt of housing benefit, can apply for assistance from the discretionary housing payment scheme at WDC. In exceptional circumstances, the housing options service may be able to assist with rent in advance to prevent homelessness from occurring.

That said, not all landlords request rent in advance with many happy to accept tenants with deposits only.”

12. Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability

“Does the Cabinet member agree with me, that the building known as the Big Yellow Storage Company on the London Road, which is opposite the junction with Hatters Lane is absolutely appalling. Prince Charles would call this a yellow carbuncle.

How on earth this obtained permission with this ghastly colour?

I know it is in that company's corporate image but it is not very attractive for local residents in the vicinity?

Can you assure me that there are safeguards preventing another monstrosity being built on the reserved sites?"

Response from Councillor N Marshall (Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability)

"No I cannot agree that the building is "appalling".

I would view this part of London Road as commercial on the south side of the road with an area that was more residential in character on the north side of the road.

High Wycombe is a town that is characterised by a scatter of employment uses across the town rather than being characterised by employment uses simply located on a few large business parks. The planning policies that operate allow for commercial uses to be developed in this part of the town.

This design and appearance of the building was approved by the Planning Committee who felt that the building's design fitted well into this setting, and although prominent, the colour was not out of keeping with its immediate surroundings.

Finally I can assure you that any future planning application on the reserved sites will be considered against current legislation, appropriate Council planning policies in force at the time and other material considerations."

13. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council

"Will the Leader of the Council join me in commending the bravery of Simon Wheatley, the Micklefield resident who last week selflessly rescued an elderly neighbour from his burning house on Micklefield Road?"

Response from Councillor R Scott (Leader of the Council)

"Thank you for your question. I did read in the Press about this unfortunate fire in a property in Micklefield Road last weekend and fully support your commendation of the brave response to a life threatening situation by Mr Wheatley. Indeed, I am sure all Members will join me in thanking him for his prompt action. This is yet another example of the community spirit that exists in this District, of which we are all fully supportive. I think we should also thank the firefighters from Bucks Fire & Rescue service, who are always respond very promptly to incidents like these.

In the last few days, we have also seen our Police and Fire Services being very active with a number of arson attacks in High Wycombe and I trust that their diligent work will soon bring an end to these types of incidents."