

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2019 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.30 PM

Members Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards (Deputy Mayor), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Jenny Cheng, UllaKarin Clark, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Graham Howe, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Angus Ross, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Ian Pittock, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Wayne Smith, Alison Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Oliver Whittle

31. MINUTE SILENCE

The Council stood in silence to honour the memory of PC Andrew Harper who was killed in the line of duty on 16 August 2019.

32. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Keith Baker, Laura Blumenthal, David Hare, Emma Hobbs, Clive Jones and Bill Soane.

33. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pauline Jorgensen declared a pecuniary interest in item 42.2 – Motion on the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Councillor Jorgensen stated that she would withdraw from the meeting during the consideration of this item.

35. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Deputy Mayor presented awards to recipients of the Mayor's Roll of Honour.

The first recipient was awarded posthumously to Peter Soul. Peter had played a significant role in the Earley Adopt a Street Campaign and had recruited more than 300 volunteers to help keep the streets of Earley clean and tidy. Two members of Peter's family accepted the award.

The second award went to Manu Dhaumya who had built the successful "United against Bullies" campaign in local schools over the past five years. Manu also sponsored Shinfield Cricket Club and organised local badminton events.

36. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

36.1 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

What action is WBC taking to safeguard our local economy following the shameful

retaliation of a local landowner who has closed the Denmark Street car park and cut off a local amenity simply because planning consent wasn't granted for the overly expensive flats on the site?

Answer

Of course the Council is concerned about the closure of the car park last month but respects the private landowner's right to manage its property as it chooses. However, we are exploring many options to understand how the car park can be re-opened at the earliest opportunity.

Supplementary Question

Can you comment on the news that a revised planning application has been submitted for the Denmark Street site?

Supplementary Answer

I understand that the Planning Authority rejected the application first time due to complex reasons. Unless the developers have worked a miracle on their application, I suspect that it may be rejected again. Furthermore, I don't think that closing the car park just to spite the community will work in their favour.

36.2 Teresa Caswell asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

What is being done to re-open the external toilets at the Wokingham Waterside Centre? These toilets are important facilities for general park users and attendees of Reading parkrun.

Answer

The Council agreed to close all of its publically accessible toilets back in 2009 and replaced them with its "Local Loo" scheme whereby the Council pay local businesses to provide a service. In respect to these toilets, shortly after the closure the Council formed a partnership with the voluntarily run Waterside Centre to continue these toilets under the guise of a "Local Loo". This meant that the toilets were operated at the discretion of the Waterside Centre, which seemed to work fine for a number of years until the demands of "parkrun" when the toilets could not cope with the new demands in relation to drainage and cleaning which were put on it.

We have now agreed a way forward with the Waterside Centre in that we have ensured that one of the toilets is now fit for their original purpose and that the opening will continue under a "Local Loo" arrangement and at the discretion of the Waterside Centre for which we will pay them as a partner. I therefore expect to have them open as soon as our new arrangement is finalised.

I would emphasise though that these toilets are not designed to take the high demand that "parkrun" places on them and the voluntary staff that operate them in such a short space of time and that alternative arrangements should be made for that event.

Supplementary Question

What is considered to be reasonable demand?

Supplementary Answer

These toilets are meant for public use, with very low usage. I don't know how many people

use the toilets during the parkrun, perhaps you can tell me (10 people per hour). I will look into the situation and we can agree a format, although the number described seems to be low anyway.

Point of Order: At this point in the meeting Prue Bray raised a Point of Order relating to the question at Minute No 36.1, under Section 4.2.9.5 of the Constitution (Scope of Questions)) which stated that “questions would not be accepted if they related to a planning or licensing application before the application had been determined by the Planning or Licencing Committee”. Councillor Bray expressed concern that by answering the question (36.1) the Council may prejudice the determination of a planning application.

The Deputy Mayor stated that Councillor Bray’s points would be noted.

36.3 Jim Swann asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency in Wokingham, will the Council please confirm when they will implement a campaign to stop parked cars from idling unnecessarily, which causes local hotspot air pollution and increased emissions?

Answer

You ask a very pertinent question and raise an issue of great concern to many residents, including myself.

The problem is that, while many modern cars are fitted with stop/start technology to reduce fuel and emissions while in traffic, many older vehicles do not benefit from this. As a result, vehicles idling while stationary in traffic or parked cause unnecessary pollution which affects both our air quality and our efforts to achieve Carbon Neutral by 2030. As a Council we are hugely keen, therefore, to try and prevent this wherever possible.

I am pleased to say that Wokingham Borough Council has already started working on this specific issue. We have introduced two Air Quality Management Areas where many residents will have already seen signs advising vehicles to turn their engines off whilst sat stationary in traffic.

An extension to this scheme is currently being considered as part of our Climate Emergency Action Plan which will be published in January. This long list of ideas will work in tandem with our efforts to reduce congestion across the Borough, which are currently underway and being spearheaded by both the Leader of this Council and the Executive Member for Highways.

With regard to parked vehicles, there is some legislation available to enable us to enforce engine shut off. However, it is complex and the enforcement process would be both expensive and time consuming. Before we commit any of our residents’ Council Tax on such a scheme, I believe we first need to conduct a detailed study to understand what the actual environmental benefit would be. We can then make a decision going forwards from there. My personal belief is that the resources could be better utilised elsewhere on other environmental projects, but until we see the benefits from the survey we will never know.

Supplementary Question

My question was specifically about parked cars. I struggle to understand why that would be so complex to monitor and to resolve. Wokingham has declared a Climate Emergency.

This is an unnecessary usage of petrol beside our schools, our children and our supermarkets, where people are. I think that it would be a very good use of resources to improve air quality for Wokingham residents. It would also be a beacon for other Councils?

Supplementary Answer

As I said when I answered your question, I share your concern about this issue. We need to have a look at what we can actually do to get our residents to switch off their engines when standing in traffic and when parked. As I said, there are options available to us in terms of enforcement of those policies, but we need to understand what the true benefit will be before we take action and commit our resources to make it happen.

36.4 Anthony Walker asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

This question concerns road safety issues for children attending Floreat Montague Park School. Prior to February 2018, parents were told that a work plan had been agreed between Wokingham Borough Council and the builder, David Wilson Homes to install zebra, toucan or pelican crossings, in place for September 2018 to enable children to cross William Heelas Way on the way to and from school. None of these crossings have been installed and despite numerous requests to both WBC and the builder, no satisfactory responses have been given.

We understand that the road is un-adopted, which appears to have put us in a 'It's not my responsibility zone'. However, this is in essence a public road being used by young school children to cross from the houses to their school and their safety must be paramount. Therefore, could WBC confirm what action is being taken and give a definitive timescale for a resolution?

Answer

Many areas of the Montague Park site will be adopted by the Council in line with legal agreements that have been entered into by David Wilson Homes for various phases of the development. The site currently remains in private ownership, it is not a public road, as David Wilson Homes has not completed all of the approved works to an adoptable standard.

As the Council is not physically delivering the planned works, we cannot commit to any dates for works to be completed, but continue to push the developer to conclude the necessary works, and commit to sign these off in good time when the details are submitted to the Council for review. We have endeavoured to facilitate David Wilson's programme for these works and remain as frustrated as you with the progress that has been made to date. The Council is continuing to work with David Wilson Homes to progress these matters as soon as possible.

I understand from the site manager that David Wilson Homes intend to start work on a zebra crossing outside the school this week. I would also like to pay tribute to Gregor Murray, one of my fellow Councillors and his wife who have been working with David Wilson Homes. They also live on the estate. I understand that Mrs Murray has helped to facilitate some speed humps put in by the developer. I understand that the developer currently has a volunteer manning a crossing point. The volunteer is a member of the building staff. They have also been working with the developer on the installation of two flashing speed signs.

I can assure you that local Councillors, including Gregor Murray and his wife, have been working very hard to make sure that the estate is as safe as possible up to the point when it is adopted properly.

Supplementary Question

What planning conditions relevant to road safety need to be complied with before the school opened three years ago? If there were none, what are the responsibilities of the builders and how does the Council ensure that these responsibilities are being met and that sanctions are imposed if they are not?

Supplementary Answer

I can't answer the specific question about the planning conditions. I will be happy to give you a written answer on that. I can assure you that if builders are in breach of planning conditions, after talking to them, we will eventually take legal action. I have seen that happen in other situations. After exhausting friendly ways of dealing with builders we will take legal action if we need to. Planning is not my area. My area is highways. But I can assure you that, if necessary, we will progress the formal route with Planning. I would stress that these are not our roads. They are not adopted by us and they will not be adopted if they are not built to standard either.

36.5 John Hutt asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Safe access paths to Floreat Montague Park School, located by the island crossing adjacent to Baker Crescent, have been arbitrarily closed by the builder, David Wilson Homes for the entire school year 2018/2019 and remain closed to date. This necessitates children taking a diversion involving the crossing of two additional roads. What actions and when can WBC ensure that the developer opens the footpaths again within a reasonable date from the, now, new school term, bearing in mind the weather and lighting conditions are going to be changing soon and thus increase the associated risk to our children?

Answer

I would largely refer you to the previous answer. I understand from communication with David Wilson Homes yesterday that they are building the first crossing at the moment. I believe that there is another crossing point which they mean and we will work as swiftly as possible with David Wilson Homes to make sure that they complete the work as soon as possible.

Supplementary Question

What responsibilities does the builder have to ensure that safe access paths remain open to children and will the Council enforce and supervise these paths, using trained personnel?

Supplementary Answer

I repeat that, until the roads are adopted, we do not have responsibility for the roads and we will not be enforcing the use of the pavements, etc. I will take advice from the Planning Authority and see what we can do to encourage them to complete the paths as soon as possible.

36.6 John Bailey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

For some time the exterior public toilets at the Waterside Centre at Thames Valley Park have not been open, causing considerable inconvenience for people visiting this popular Thameside recreational area. Please could you advise me of the plans for the cleaning, maintenance and ongoing improvement of this important facility?

Answer

The Council supports the toilet facility at the privately run Waterside Centre through the "Local Loo" scheme whereby the Council pays a nominal amount to cover the cost of the local business to provide access to these facilities for the public at their discretion.

Unfortunately, due to pressures the toilet became inoperable and was closed. This has now been resolved and the Waterside Centre is able to open this toilet to the public again during its opening times. However it remains difficult and you have been quoted a figure of 10 people every hour, but it would be nice actually if you provided a toilet facility for your parkrun, as other people do. 10 people per hour, we may be able to cope with that, but it is only a simple toilet.

Supplementary Question

What do you do, as a Council, to make sure that your arbitrary arrangements with the Waterside Centre are actually happening and they are actually keeping them clean and opening them?

Supplementary Answer

We do keep regular contact with the Waterside Centre, as we pay for this facility and we have to monitor it anyway.

36.7 Peter Dennis asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Montague Park is a relatively new development within Wokingham, however it appears that several important infrastructure things have been neglected. For example the promised community centre is due to be handed over as an empty shell, no finish and fitting. This is not useful for anyone, the road crossing are incomplete and in poor repair (lines on road are worn) and one of which is dangerous (I nearly flattened a jogger one weekend). What is the Council doing to rectify this situation?

Answer

The infrastructure requirement for the South Wokingham SDL include new or improved local shopping parades north and south of the railway line and one community facility to be located south of the railway line.

Whilst there was no requirement for a community facility north of the railway line, the Council was successful in securing a small, additional community facility in the local centre on Montague Park funded by the developers. This facility is over and above what infrastructure contribution the developer was required to provide and unfortunately did not include a commitment to fund the fitting out of the facility. It therefore was left to the Council to identify how to fund the balance; which we are currently addressing. I'm sure we can get more information from the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure in writing if required.

In respect of the highway infrastructure elements within the site, the Council will be adopting many areas of the Montague Park site in line with legal agreements (Section 38

of the Highways Act) entered into by David Wilson Homes for various phases of the development. The site currently remains in private ownership as David Wilson Homes has not completed all of the approved works to an adoptable standard. As the Council is not physically delivering the planned works, we cannot commit to any dates for works to be completed by David Wilson Homes. We regularly meet with them and are doing our best to ensure that they maintain a safe site for residents and users. There was a mention earlier about the path not being completed yet, one of the reasons that some of the paths had closed is that David Wilson Homes are building next door to those paths, so they are closed for safety reasons. Any and all safety defects, incidences fall to David Wilson Homes during this stage and they are liable as a company should any issues arise.

The Council is continuing to work with David Wilson Homes to progress the delivery of the sites as soon as physically possible.

Supplementary Question

This is talking about the additional road surface that goes into Montague Park, which is awful and leads to a lot of noise. As I am sure that the Council can appreciate, the hot weather this year and sitting in your garden, and how the residents next to that road cannot do that due to the noise generated by the passing traffic on London Road which is part of your responsibility. Issues have been logged but were deemed not worthy of work, bearing in mind we have a whole bunch of work going across the County. Can the Council commit to work on London Road bearing in mind this is going to get busier due to the SDL going in there, and actually use some of the CIL money that the developers give us to improve the infrastructure for the local area.

Supplementary Answer

I would certainly commit to coming and meeting you on site, seeing what the problems are, bringing an Officer with me and seeing what we can do to improve the situation for the residents.

37. PETITIONS

The following Member presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

The Mayor’s decision as to the action to be taken is set out against the petition.

Councillor Stephen Conway	<p>Stephen Conway presented a petition containing 17 signatures relating to a request for residents’ only parking in Brook Street, Twyford.</p> <p><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport.</i></p>
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38. PRESENTATION OF THE TENANTS' CHARTER

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 51 to 83, which set out the Wokingham Borough Tenants Charter. Members also viewed a short film which gave examples of positive feedback from residents in support of the Charter.

The report was introduced by Steve Bowers (Chairperson of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel – TLIP).

The report stated that the Tenants Charter had been developed by the Borough's Involved Tenants. The Charter set out a number of aspirations relating to initiatives that would modernise the customer experience and ensure continuous improvement. These included:

- Tackling the stigma associated with being a Council tenant;
- Maximising the accessibility of Council services;
- Modernising tenant engagement to increase active involvement;
- Providing greater choice on the delivery of repairs;
- Responding to an ageing tenant population;
- Greater transparency relating to health and safety inspections.

Following the presentation of the report, Members asked questions and commended the excellent work being carried out across the Borough by TLIP.

It was moved by John Kaiser and seconded by Prue Bray that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the aspirations outlined in the Tenants Charter be noted and the Council and TLIP continue to work in partnership to achieve them;
- 2) progress in addressing the Charter be formally reviewed in two years' time.

39. TREASURY MANAGEMENT - OUTTURN REPORT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 85 to 114, which summarised the Treasury Management operations during 2018/19.

The report was presented for monitoring and review purposes in accordance with the Council's Treasury Management procedures. It confirmed that the Council had adhered to all agreed Prudential Indicators during the year.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Treasury Management Outturn report for 2018/19 be approved;
- 2) The actual 2018/19 Prudential Indicators set out in the report be approved.

40. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 115 to 120, which gave details of proposed changes to the Council's Constitution as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by Imogen Shepherd-Dubey that the recommendations in the report be approved.

On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Sections 4.4.23 and 4.4.43 (Wokingham Wellbeing Board) be amended as set out in Paragraph 1 of the report;
- 2) Section 5.5.7 – Arrangements for the Meeting (Individual Executive Member Decision) be amended as set out in Paragraph 2 of the report;
- 3) Additions be made to Section 13.2.1 – Application and Scope, as set out in Paragraph 3 of the report.

41. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

41.1 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Can the Executive Member for Highways guarantee that the works on the Winnersh Relief Road Part 2, including the roundabout for the NWDR (needed for access for residents of Woodward Close), be completed and opened first before other parts of the roads projects so Winnersh and Wokingham residents can see the benefits of the road projects, especially if they are hopefully completed on time and on budget?

Answer

The development of the Winnersh Relief Road 2 and North Wokingham Distributor Road West of Old Forest Road have been agreed by the Council as a single project and is in contract with our Major Projects delivery contractor currently. Any change will delay the contract, increase traffic disturbance and incur unnecessary costs.

Delivering the work as agreed by the Council brings huge advantages, for example resource use and deployment, material use (and inter-site material use), driving down utility diversion costs, combining the site compounds etc and completing the necessary ecological work in both areas at the same time. This work will be followed by topsoil stripping, tree/stump clearance, compound set up, utility diversion where practical, amongst other items, which will take us up to the spring of 2020. We are currently reviewing the capability of bringing the King Street Lane work forward within the programme to October/November 2019 in combination with planned advance works.

Should we undertake the roundabout work as suggested in isolation, this will increase construction cost and cause additional inconvenience to drivers as Reading Road would then be affected twice, i.e. the delivery of the Easterly roundabout for the NWDR WOFR section. Our strategy is to build the two roundabouts off-line, where possible (keeping free flowing traffic along Reading Road) and then through a quick series of 'on carriageway' works on Reading Road to connect everything up. This approach will also allow better coordination of required utility diversions within one operation, as opposed to a split

approach.

Supplementary Question

I think you have missed my question somewhere in the process. I said both roundabouts included in this, but if we had the NWDR roundabout and the Winnersh Relief Road it will help both the residents of Wokingham and the residents of Winnersh get to work easier rather than waiting for the whole of both projects to be finished all at once, because there are other parts that won't affect this quite as much.

Supplementary Answer

Maybe we should have an offline conversation about what you are suggesting. But, currently it is all one programme and to split the programme into two pieces would cost about an extra £400k. But, if we can do anything to speed things up I am happy to talk about it.

41.2 Chris Smith had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question and as he was unable to attend the meeting the following answer was sent to him:

Question

Can the Executive Member provide an update on the annual statement of the accounts?

Answer

The Council published its draft accounts on 31 May 2019 in accordance with statutory deadlines. There then followed a period of audit by Ernst & Young (EY), the Council's appointed auditors. This was due to complete by 31 July 2019, when the audited accounts would be published. Unfortunately, due to circumstances outside of both the Council's and EY's control, concerning the audit of the Royal Berkshire Pension Fund, EY were not able to 'sign-off' the accounts by 31 July 2019. All other aspects of the audit have been completed satisfactorily.

There are no consequences or implications on the Council for this delay, which is outside of our control and will clearly impact on all Berkshire Unitary Authorities.

The accounts for 2018/19, as at 31 July 2019, have been published on the Council's website with an explanation as to why they are still unsigned.

41.3 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Can the Executive Member for Highways provide me with a status update on the Council's plans to ease congestion?

Answer

We are very concerned about congestion and we are doing as much as we can to try and alleviate it. The Council has for a number of years worked hard to alleviate congestion across the Borough through the development of a number of new strategic roads and junctions, collaborative planning and sensitive co-ordination of street works, and effective communication with residents through the use of social media and promotion of the roadworks.org map. As part of our proactive approach, we have secured £24m for the funding of the Arborfield Relief Road. In recent months the Council has established a dedicated congestion project team which has identified four key areas of work to further

reduce the impact of congestion;

1. a review of our approach to Streetworks (including a review of sensitive streets network). Sensitive streets allow us to move road works where possible into time where they are not inconveniencing passengers or travellers on the road;
2. the development of an Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Strategy (including the use of variable messaging signs to bring drivers the latest information);
3. an improved focus on communications (including a market research survey, and improved social media interaction via the traffic team, and much better use of press releases);
4. in the longer term the use of real time traffic monitoring to help the Council to manage the local highway network.

The Council is making good progress on these work streams and has already instructed consultants to assist in the production of the ITS Strategy and the market research survey. There is lots more to do, but we are very committed to making sure that people have the right information available to be able to plan their routes; avoiding road works where possible.

To make the point, most of the roadworks within the Borough are not run by the Borough Council, they are run by utilities companies such as South West Water and Thames Water. We need to work around these utilities and provide people with the right information to plan their journeys. That's what we intend to do.

Supplementary Question

In my ward, Sonning, a couple of Thursdays back, Thames Water were digging up Thames Street, causing a long traffic jam. I was stuck in it for an hour or so just to try to get over the river. I wonder what sort of penalties we can apply to these utility companies, because they really do take liberties with our roads and our residents.

Answer

There are two things to consider here. If we have emergency roadworks relating, for example, to burst water mains or gas leaks, we cannot insist that the utilities wait for a couple of weeks to do the works when it is convenient for us. Otherwise we would all be afloat. We do have to let utility companies repair roads due to emergencies. Nevertheless, they need to communicate properly. They do need to put signage on their roadworks so we know what is going on. If they do leave signs out after roadworks, there is a small penalty. It is probably insignificant to a utility company, but the amount is set statutorily. So, we can fine people for leaving roadworks in place longer than they should but, in essence, it is probably not a lot.

41.4 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

You have stated publicly that you intend to ask residents for their ideas on how Wokingham Borough can reach Carbon Neutrality by 2030, please can you update us on when this consultation will begin and what form it will take?

Answer

I have indeed previously stated my intention to consult all residents of Wokingham Borough and ask them for their ideas on how we can reach Carbon Neutrality by 2030 and I am very pleased to announce that this consultation will be on September 26th, a week from today, using the WBC online portal.

Residents, businesses, schools, residents groups, Town and Parish Councils and any other interested local parties will be welcome to respond to four simple questions and share with us their thoughts, feedback, ideas and suggestions on how we meet this most stretching of targets as agreed at our last full Council meeting.

I encourage anybody with an idea to share it. You may think others will have said the same thing, but repetition is a good thing as it will show us the strength of feeling behind specific ideas across the Borough.

The consultation will be widely publicised using Wokingham Borough Council's social media forums and print media. I encourage everyone to get involved and send in your ideas. Tell your family, tell your friends, your uncles and aunts, your colleagues and neighbours, your classmates and teachers and everybody else and make sure that they are contributing.

If you can't get onto the portal write to Wokingham Borough Council, write to me, write to any of the elected Members in this Chamber. We will ensure that your idea is included in the list for consideration for the Action Plan and by the cross party working group and Council Officers.

I will publish a summary of all the ideas that we receive to ensure 100% visibility and clarity.

Initially, the consultation will be open for 3 months, until the end of December, but it is my intention that, if it is successful, we will open it up and keep it as an ongoing consultation so that anybody who comes up with a great idea in five years' time, in the middle of the night, can go onto the WBC website and share that idea with us so that we can achieve our stretching target.

Supplementary Question

We are working hard to reduce, reuse and recycle. Would you agree that it is far better to reduce and reuse than to recycle. Can you tell me what the Council plans do to reduce the use of plastic?

Supplementary Answer

I have put forward a Motion for this evening and, hopefully, if time permits, we will get to it. That Motion will call on the Council to eradicate single use plastics from our operations and supply chains. We appreciate that there is a degree of essential single use plastics that the Borough has to have, for example some of our elderly residents cannot drink water without using a single plastic straw. In all other instances we are looking to remove single use plastics from our supply chain because, frankly, the impact they are having on our environment is awful. It is devastating and we need to plan our part.

Note: At this point in the meeting Andy Croy raised a Point of Order under Paragraph 4.2.9.5 (Scope of questions) on the basis that the question was frivolous. This related to the fact that the Executive Member had reported similar information to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its meeting on the previous evening.

The Deputy Mayor stated that the question was not frivolous and should be heard.

41.5 Graham Howe asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

Food waste recycling has been in place for some months now. Can the Executive Member please update me on the progress made thus far?

Answer

It is all going very well, if I may say so. Since April 2019 a total of 1,553 tonnes of food waste has been collected and recycled. On top of this a further 214 tonnes of residual waste has been minimised from the blue bags and has, therefore, not gone to landfill. The introduction of food waste has also had an indirect impact on dry recycling which increased by 300 tonnes in the first four months of the year.

We have continued to collect 18 tonnes a day, which equates to 90 tonnes a week although tonnage has dropped slightly in July and August, probably due to school holidays. We are not complacent and continue to communicate and promote the service to maintain momentum. We are now working with managing agents and housing associations to introduce food waste collections into multi occupancies such as flats and apartments.

Every tonne of waste diverted from landfill or energy from waste to recycling saves the Council approximately £100. Diversion of 1553 tonnes has come with the saving of £155k in four months, which is reinvested back into the system to support the new collection service. I would urge everyone to support this service, which increases our recycling and reduces our carbon footprint.

Incidentally, Reading Borough Council has approached us, as a shining example, to learn from us as they are planning to introduce a food waste service from next year.

41.6 UllaKarin Clark asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Could the Executive Member for Planning please give me the results of the Housing Target Consultation?

Answer

We received just under 50,000 individual responses, of which 46,807 (94%), if you want the exact number, agreed with us and stated that, in their opinion, the Government housing target is too high.

We believe this was an excellent response rate and, although we have always believed residents' agreed with us on the issue, we now have clear evidence to use going forwards.

We will use this evidence and continue to use evidence moving forwards to strengthen our ongoing argument that the current system is arbitrary and this result is clear evidence that our residents think that the amount we are being asked to deliver is too much.

We are required by government policy to work within their rules and guidance in

developing our Local Plan, which we are doing. This is not a matter of choice. It is something that we have to work to and something which we have to have in place; otherwise we will get development in places that we don't want. It needs to reflect housing needs and, if we are not successful, we will be saying to Government that, if you want us to accommodate these houses, we really need your full support in working with our local MPs.

We are calling on massive up-front infrastructure funding so that the roads and other facilities needed can be provided early. We have already heard several examples this evening where housing comes after the infrastructure and we have a massive programme of up-front funding. But in some cases it does not deliver all the infrastructure that we need before the houses are finalised. We also need guaranteed protection in relation to developers who build in areas that don't fit our normal plans and guidance. We can also strengthen local support for our development. We are also asking that future developments are eco-friendly and fit within our environmental principles.

41.7 Pauline Helliard-Symons asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

Can you please confirm to Council, in light of the recent acquisition of the Waitrose property asset in Twyford, the performance of the Property Investment Portfolio as a whole?

Answer

The make-up and performance of the investment portfolio is disclosed in a statement on the Council's public web site as we wanted to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to being transparent about how these funds are being invested. The link to the relevant page was promoted in our recent 'Investing for Success' press release on 12th August 2019. It is easy to find:

<http://news.wokingham.gov.uk/news/investing-for-success/>

The portfolio statement (as at 31st March) is being updated in light of the latest acquisition and will be revised on the public web site.

The August press release confirmed that the rate of return on the portfolio as at 31st March (prior to Waitrose) was over 5.5%. Following the purchase of Waitrose the rate is now just over 5.25% reflecting the enhanced length and security of income from this new asset.

As a Council we are very pleased with the performance of the investment portfolio. It continues to generate an excellent return on our investment which we are already using to fund essential services for local residents.

41.8 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

How many Staff/Members have received Penalty Charge Notices since the scheme was introduced?

Answer

We are unable to answer this question as the Council does not record or issue Penalty Notices to individuals. They are issued to vehicles found to contravene restrictions with no correlation to the driver's status, whether Members, staff or visitors at any point in the CPE process.

Supplementary Question

In a way I probably worded the question incorrectly. What I was really asking was how many penalty notices have been issued to people using the Shute End car parks.

Answer

I do not have that particular piece of information, but I can tell you that the total disabled parking contraventions is 1,986, of which 1,278 PCN's were issued for on street Code 40 offences and 708 PCN's were issued for off street Code 87 offences. I will get you data on the car park here.

41.9 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Could the Lead Member for Children's Services agree to make representations to our local Members of Parliament and Government concerning the need to ensure that our schools are effectively funded?

Answer

I note that the Government has announced an additional £2.6 billion extra funding into the schools budget in 2020/21, which includes £700 million earmarked for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. However, we do not know how much Wokingham is going to get.

Bearing in mind that Wokingham is the worst funded authority in the country, I contacted John Redwood a couple of months ago. I did say to him that whatever Wokingham is going to get for our schools, it is not enough and I want more. He was very sympathetic. He agreed to make representations to the Minister for Education and the Officers are now busy preparing a business case to strengthen my request.

41.10 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

How do we support the providers of care to our vulnerable adults in the Borough?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has a duty to understand its local market of care providers and stimulate a diverse range of care and support services to ensure that people in the Borough and their carers have choice over how their needs are met and that they are able to achieve the things that are important to them.

We recognise, however, that we cannot deliver success on our own and we value the partnerships we have formed over many years in the local market. By continuing to support our local providers we find creative and cost-effective ways to promote health and wellbeing that meet the needs of all of our residents, especially the most vulnerable.

Quality assurance is a vital part of what we do. It is a continual process by which standards are set and achievements are monitored. We are committed to ensuring that the

services people receive are of the highest quality possible and deliver what our partners and residents expect. Our Quality Assurance Team work with local providers to ensure that standards are met and outcomes for service users are achieved. Where necessary, the Team work with providers to ensure that corrective action is taken and that all quality standards are improving.

Our local providers have access to the Council's learning platform – My Learning. This provides our partners with access to training on adult safeguarding, health and safety and GDPR. Sustained ability of the adult health and social care market is of major importance to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all vulnerable adults with a range of social care needs.

To support the sustainability of the market we have invested an additional £770k in local provision. To provide support beyond that we have continued to invest in 2019/20 and beyond. We are currently working with the LGA to develop a market position statement. This is a document produced by the Authority which outlines the support and care services people need and how they need to be provided. It is envisaged that this will be completed by October 2019. We are also restarting our provider forums with the next one set for 14 October 2019.

41.11 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I understand that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan funding only covers the Wokingham Town area. What plans are in place to cover the rest of the Borough?

Answer

We are currently undertaking a Greenway programme across the Borough and as part of the Local Transport Plan process we are compiling a list of cycling and walking requirements around the Borough. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) will build on this work and give us a formal, recognised, method of assessment which will help us prioritise works in future.

The current work being undertaken on LCWIP is being progressed following a successful bid to the Department for Transport for funding in the form of technical support, match funded by WBC. The bid was based on progressing the LCWIP in the Wokingham Town Centre area only as an initial stage due to the limited support available.

The plan is to continue the process of assessing on an area by area basis until we have covered the whole Borough. You may be aware that Reading LCWIP covers parts of our Borough and in time we aim to have a fully integrated Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan covering the whole Borough and extending into our neighbours. The exact plan and how it is funded will depend on the Local Transport Plan 4 work which is currently underway; this will identify our priorities and help us to plan all of our potential schemes and initiatives to make best use of the available funding.

I recognise, like you, that cycleways and paths do not finish at ward or town boundaries. The important thing is for people to be able to get where they need to go, regardless of boundaries.

41.12 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The 4 and X4 bus services provide a frequent and well-used service between Wokingham Town Centre and homes in Earley close to Wokingham Road. However, the absence of direct connections between most of Maiden Erlegh and Lower Earley and Wokingham Town Centre makes it very difficult for residents who depend on public transport when they need to visit the Council Offices to access services, and to use the many other facilities in Wokingham Town Centre. Is there any planning underway that would address this issue?

Answer

The Council appreciates that some residents would like a direct service to Wokingham Town from the Lower Earley and Maiden Erlegh areas. The Council is currently in the process of updating Local Transport Plan 4, which I referred to earlier. Once this has been adopted a revised Borough-wide bus strategy will be written. As part of the work undertaken for the bus strategy, demand across the Borough for bus services will be reconsidered.

It should be noted that in addition to the 4 and X4 services, there is also a regular train service departing from Earley Rail Station going to Wokingham, which I find very convenient.

Supplementary Question

Could this also be used as an opportunity to reintroduce a bus stop at Brookside Close, by the busy Brookside Surgery?

Supplementary Answer

I recognise the constant need to put bus stops in the right places. We will look at that suggestion as part of the considerations.

41.13 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

Along with yourself and Councillors Burgess and Croy, I attended Extinction Rebellion's first public meeting in Wokingham at the beginning of the month. You, in fact, were the guest speaker at the event. We all know the climate crisis we face. Extinction Rebellion exists to ensure we act and we act now. It makes three demands of governments:

- Tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency;
- Act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025;
- Create and be led by a citizen's assembly on climate and ecological justice.

This Council has already declared a climate emergency and thus taken the first step towards action. Will the Executive Member for Climate Emergency consider taking the next step by giving his full support to Extinction Rebellion's ethos and all of its aims by setting up a local citizens' assembly within the next three months to inform local policy on how to tackle this crisis?

Answer

I can confirm that, on September 3rd, I spoke for approximately 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of a presentation on the climate crisis held by Extinction Rebellion Wokingham.

I can also confirm that on August 29th I met with several members of the Extinction

Rebellion Reading organising group to discuss our approach to Climate Emergency and our path forward in the coming months.

As stated in the Extinction Rebellion Guide to Citizen's Assemblies the purpose of such assembly is to 1) Listen, 2) Learn, 3) Deliberate and 4) Decide on actions required in order to meet the objectives of net carbon zero, something Wokingham Borough Council has committed to doing by 2030 as part of our Climate Emergency Declaration.

Something else we have committed to is to establish a cross party working group to investigate and propose further recommendations to help achieve a carbon neutral Borough, reporting back in 6 months. Specifically, and I quote directly from the minutes of the last full Council meeting: "the working group will invite, consult and involve as wide a participation from our local community as possible, in order to create a broad consensus of how we contribute to the fight against the climate crisis". These are also similar to the stated objectives of the Extinction Rebellion Citizens' Assembly.

I have already announced that on September 26th we will begin a consultation with residents, asking them to feed in all of their ideas for how we tackle climate change across the Borough. These ideas will be published for all to see. They will be brought to the working group to be discussed, debated and decided upon.

We have already sought expert advice, both by opening lines of communication with Extinction Rebellion Reading, and by talking with Reading University on how we calculate our carbon footprint, and I welcome the invitation of other expert opinion to the meetings of the working group, as laid out in the minutes of the last meeting.

Once we have an action plan, elements of it will be subjected to further public and business consultation, but this cannot be done until we have a definitive list of potential actions and measures.

Resident events to discuss the climate crisis are already being organised across the Borough. Greener Wokingham has one organised for September 25th. I actively encourage input from all these organisations across the Borough.

Supplementary Question

A consultation is not really the same as a citizens' assembly. I do understand that we will be talking to residents, but can I have confirmation, yes or no, are we going to have a citizens' assembly?

Supplementary Answer

To specifically answer that question; it was the final part of my earlier answer. I understand the objectives of a Climate Emergency. I feel that everything we are putting in place in terms of inviting public input, holding it to scrutiny and inviting expert opinion means that, in the short term, we are clearly living up to the ideals and expectations of an Extinction Rebellion citizens' assembly.

Once we have an action plan in place, I will be happy to re-discuss this suggestion with Councillor Kerr and other members of the working group.

41.14 Adrian Mather asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

In order to objectively track progress towards this Council's declared goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and to be able to continuously and accurately monitor total CO₂ emission levels compared to the current base level.

Can the Executive Member confirm the current monitoring mechanisms that are in place now and include in his answer any that may need to be urgently added or upgraded to enable the Council to accurately monitor total CO₂ emission levels?

Answer

I welcome this question from Cllr Mather as an opportunity to update all Members on a few key areas of focus for the Council since we declared a Climate Emergency at our July meeting.

In order to be able to achieve Carbon Neutral by 2030 it is clearly essential that we must first calculate the starting point of what our carbon footprint currently is. Only from there can we begin to develop and implement an action plan that will both reduce and offset our carbon emissions between now and 2030.

The most recent figures published by the National Atmospheric Emissions Authority estimated the Carbon Footprint of Wokingham Borough at 771,000 tonnes in 2017. The good news is that this has tracked downwards since 2013 as a result of work already being implemented across the Borough by residents and businesses. Clearly our increased housing and population will have added to this figure.

Working from two year old data though is clearly not an ideal starting point. To enable a more accurate current figure I have established a Cross-Council 'Climate Emergency Officer Implementation Group', chaired by Graham Ebers, and that I have also attended. A key early task for this Group will be to establish a carbon footprint baseline and a framework for the ongoing monitoring and publishing of progress in reducing our carbon footprint across the Borough.

I have asked Officers to review multiple approaches to calculating our carbon footprint to ensure the baseline number that we work from is as accurate as possible. Fortunately, as part of an increasing group of Councils that have declared a climate emergency, we have access to a growing wealth of data and techniques for calculating a Carbon Footprint. We also have access to a fantastic bank of knowledge and experience at the University of Reading.

As soon as it has been calculated it is my intention to publish this baseline carbon footprint so that it is clear to all our residents just how big and important a task we have ahead of us.

Whilst I cannot be specific about any potential gaps at this stage I have asked Officers to develop a draft monitoring framework that is both robust and practicable. I will, of course, share this with the cross party working group on Climate Emergency and am also happy to share it with all Councillors and residents once the methodology is finalised.

Supplementary Question

Can the Executive Member confirm that both the construction and operating emissions of new houses, roads and commercial premises will be counted in the CO₂ emissions?

Supplementary Answer

Yes they will.

41.15 Maria Gee had asked the Leader of Council the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

The closure of the Denmark Street Car Park at the end of the August Bank Holiday came as a surprise to residents. However, there had been rumours circulating in the media about its closure since the middle of July. This car park is used by many visitors and is preferred to multi storey car parks by wheelchair users and other blue badge holders due to its proximity to the town centre and the flat access. Its loss is therefore both the residents and the town's loss.

Given the rumours that were circulating about closure, can you please confirm the individual dates when each member of the Executive became aware of this decision?

Answer

As you state, there were rumours circulating about the closure of this car park in the media. However, Executive Members only became aware of the decision to close the car park on or around Friday 23rd August 2019 when the notice was posted at the entrance to the car park – at the same time as everyone else.

41.16 Rachel Bishop-Firth had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

The new estate on Montague Park has been provided with a community centre. This community centre is, unfortunately, a completely empty shell. There are no floors, toilets, or heating – never mind chairs, tables, an area to plug in a kettle or anything else which would make this community centre useable by the community.

A very dedicated church group are looking at how they could turn this empty shell into a functioning community centre. They estimate that the cost of doing so will be around £260,000. They are actively seeking grants, but raising this amount of money is clearly a major challenge for any local voluntary organisation.

If it's possible to raise this kind of money and get the building fitted out, there is then another problem. There will be substantial running costs.

The empty shell which has been provided is directly underneath flats. This means that it could be suitable for running quiet daytime events, for example a prayer group, parent and toddler group, or a coffee morning for the elderly. These groups are unlikely to raise the level of funds which would be needed to keep the centre going. The community centre would not be suitable for parties or most other evening events, which limits the amount of income that it can generate.

What does the Council now plan to do with this facility, in order to provide Montague Park residents with a community centre?

Answer

The infrastructure requirement for the South Wokingham SDL includes new or improved

local shopping parades north and south of the railway line and one community facility to be located south of the railway line.

Whilst there was no requirement for a community facility north of the railway line, the Council was successful in securing a small, additional community facility in the local centre on Montague Park funded by the developers. This facility is over and above what infrastructure contribution the developer was required to provide but unfortunately did not include a commitment to funding the fitting out of the facility.

It was left to the Council to identify how to fund the balance for the fit out of the facility; which we are continuing to address. Central to this work have been discussions with local groups to explore options on how the facility will be used and how to find the resources to get it operational. The Council has a preference for local community facilities to be operated by local community groups or organisations, which is why the majority of our work on finding a solution for Montague Park has focused on this outcome.

It is expected that the new community facility in Montague Park will be handed over to the Council sometime next summer (2020).

As with all community facilities provided by the Council, we would want them to be flexible and adaptable spaces that are able to be accessed by the local community for a wide variety of uses. The Council does not want this facility to stand empty or go unused and we are committed to finding a solution to making it operational before it is handed over to the Council next year.

41.17 Clive Jones had asked the Leader of the Council the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

Can the Leader of the Council let us know what has happened with the responses to the Council's recent Housing Consultation whilst confirming what the next steps in the consultation process will be?

Answer

I would like to add my thanks to all the many residents who took the time to respond to the consultation.

The consultation was a standalone exercise to allow us to evidence the views of residents, and I am very pleased that we now able to clearly illustrate the strong view that the government housing target is too high.

In the answer to Councillor UllaKarin Clark's earlier question, we explained that we will use this evidence to strengthen our ongoing argument with the Government that the current system is arbitrary and that, as a result, what is being asked of this Borough is too much.

41.18 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

We are very glad to see that the Berkshire Concrete business that was operating from

Toutley Depot, has finally moved out. This was a sub-let tenant that moved in without the appropriate planning permission and it then took WBC a year and a half of considerable effort to evict them. Please can you advise what measures Wokingham Borough Council is going to put into place to ensure that this does not happen on Wokingham Borough Council property again?

Answer

The right for the Tenant to sub-let with Landlord's consent, which is not to be unreasonably withheld, is a normal Tenant right within leases. If we were to deny this right in leases going forward it is possible that it would limit our opportunity to let properties (and therefore impact upon income to WBC). As WBC deal with a whole array of different types and uses of properties, it is necessary to allow flexibility and, therefore, enhance our opportunities of letting such properties.

Any sub-letting moving forward will need the permission of WBC and necessary planning permissions if appropriate.

41.19 Andy Croy had asked the Leader of the Council the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

Could the Leader give me the dates of Executive or Corporate Leadership Team meetings at which the close of the private car park in Denmark Street has been on the agenda?

Answer

The rumours around the closure of the car park have only been in circulation in recent weeks during which time senior Officers and Members in various meetings have discussed and considered the impact and opportunities in relation to this car park and have been alive to this issue in the context of mitigating the impact on our community and maximising the opportunity for them.

41.20 Caroline Smith had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

Elevate is a service to help young adults into work, further education, training, work experience or just work - it has been surpassing all expectations in delivering on its main aim, helping 321 young adults over the last 3 years, which is great for the young adults of Wokingham.

I understand it has received some funding from the EU. Please can the Councillor concerned confirm if WBC will be keeping this very valuable service operating in the future regardless of EU funding?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council will continue to have a responsibility to track and support young people in relation to their Education, Employment and Training, and as such there are no plans to cease the service if EU funding is not forthcoming in the future.

42. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

42.1 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

We have talked tonight about Climate Change and congestion. We have two railway stations in Winnersh. All three ward Members have met with representatives of South West Railways to talk about the lack of disabled access to both stations.

There was a small pot of money to help with Winnersh Triangle. It is nowhere near enough to do anything because the station is up on an embankment and is almost unmanageable for disabled access, even though it is next to a business park. So people with disabilities or mobility problems can't use it to get to work.

Since South West Railways took over Winnersh Station they have removed the ability to have ramps at the station to help people getting off the train and up the slope as they say that the slopes are too steep, even though they were perfectly fine before they took over the franchise.

Could the Executive Member undertake to work with us to try to persuade South West Railways to do something about disabled access to these stations?

Answer

I am very much aware of this issue which causes people to have to get on at the wrong station and go backwards and forwards to Reading. There has been a recent announcement by the railways that we can bid for money to improve stations. So I have suggested to Highways that they bid for some money to improve Winnersh Triangle because its access is not good enough. I am happy to meet with you to see what we can do together to move this forwards.

42.2 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Tomorrow has been declared as a day for a Climate Emergency strike. Students at a school in my ward, Bulmershe School, are planning to not be at school. I understand that headteachers have to mark tomorrow down as unauthorised absence from school. Will you join me in congratulating the young heroines and heroes who are taking part in the Climate strike and, by way of compensating them for this unauthorised absence, will you look at awarding some sort of certificate to recognise them standing up for their futures?

Answer

I can't promise you anything without discussing it with the Officers but, coming from the same country as Greta, I am sympathetic to what these children are doing. I can't say any more, as you will understand, I need to speak to the Officers.

42.3 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

A site at Johnson Drive in Finchampstead is due to go to Planning Appeal in October. Three separate planning applications for housing have been made on this site in the past four years. Each one has been turned down by WBC. It has then been taken to appeal,

basically to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. On one occasion the developer withdrew the appeal on the day of the appeal. On another occasion the developer lost the appeal. The third appeal is in October. Fighting these continual appeals has cost WBC hundreds of thousands of pounds and has led to residents living with this unreasonable situation for the past four years.

Do you agree with me that developers should not be able to submit residents to repeated planning applications on the same site where there is a clear record, tested at appeal, which shows that there is little chance of the application going through?

Answer

I absolutely agree. You know what I would like to do. Get rid of Bristol and allow our Planning Officers in this Authority to run the Planning process. I am as frustrated as you. I get calls every day regarding situations like this. There have been various applications on this site and, over a period, they have reduced it from 56 houses to 40 houses, then 35 houses. I hope that we get a resolution next month. In the meantime, we will work with you, your residents and the Enforcement Team to ensure that they comply.

42.4 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

The new estate being built at Matthewsgreen has included promise of a community centre. I am concerned because the community centre at Montague Park was, as referred to earlier, delivered as an empty shell with no floors, no toilets and no heating. Can the Council confirm that the Matthewsgreen community centre will be provided in a condition whereby it can be used as a community centre?

Answer

We have approaches from several organisations seeking to run that community centre. We are still working on that. I am hoping that eventually someone will come up with a good idea and the ability to run it. So, wait and see.

42.5 Jenny Cheng asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Can I have an update on the resurfacing work on Kingfisher Drive? I have heard that residents have concerns about the quality of the work.

Answer

I have been in a lot of conversations about Kingfisher Drive over the last few days, both on social media and with Officers. I have also seen some interesting pictures of the road. I talked to Highways Officers both last night and today. They are going to have a look at the road. I would point out that the road isn't complete yet and the state of the road is not the same as the end state will be. Nevertheless, Highways Officers will visit and confirm that the repairs are being done properly.

42.6 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Climate Change the following question:

Question

I welcome the decision by the Council to fit photovoltaic panels to all Council-owned properties. The new Bulmershe leisure centre, which is currently under construction in my ward, has a roof which is eminently suitable for a large number of such panels. However, the energy assessment submitted with the planning application states “the inclusion of photovoltaic panels is not considered at this stage”. It goes on to say that this can be revised at a later stage in the design.

Surely the inclusion of these panels, whilst still at the construction stage, is likely to cost less than retrofitting. Furthermore, the financial gains from feeding into the grid will help considerably with the running costs of the centre. Can you tell us whether the leisure centre is going to have panels and, if so, when they will be fitted?

Answer

I cannot commit to when the panels will be fitted. I would need to speak to the Officers. I completely agree with you that it would have been better to install them at the time of construction rather than retrofitting them. I will commit to having a look at it and seeing if there is an opportunity to install them sooner rather than later.

42.7 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

My question is about disabled parking. The criteria for Blue Badge holders has recently been extended to those with hidden and non-visible conditions. However, residents in my ward are already reporting a lack of disabled parking places in certain areas in the town centre. Bearing in mind the likely increase in demand for Blue Badges with the extension of the scheme, what steps is the Executive taking to ensure that disabled parking provision in the town centre meets the demands of our disabled residents and visitors?

Answer

We have been monitoring the extra applications for disabled badges so far and, actually, the demand for the extra non-visible disability provision has not been as large as we expected or feared. However, I will be very interested in the areas that you think are short of spaces and I would be happy to talk to you about where the spaces are lacking and what we can do to improve them.

42.8 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

Would the Executive Member care to distance himself from a recent Conservative leaflet which pours scorn on the idea of a “Green Wall” in Twyford as a way to help reduce pollution at the village crossroads? This rejection of a locally generated idea has gone down very badly in Twyford and has irritated a local benefactor, the newly ennobled Conservative Peer, Lord Brownlow, who is aware of the scientific evidence in favour of a green wall and is willing to fund it.

Answer

I have not seen the leaflet that you are referring to. It is not our policy and not what we are intending to do. You and I have spoken about the green wall in the past. You know that I am an advocate of it. I would like to see it happen providing that a suitable site can be found. If you provide me with a copy of the leaflet I will look into it.

42.9 Ian Pittock asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Can you provide an update on the Gorse Ride project, given that the word on the street is that management changes are occurring and you now intend to reduce the amount of social housing on the estate? I would be grateful if you could dispel residents' fears on this.

Answer

As far as I am concerned, the same number of affordable units should be delivered. I have made it very clear to Members that, when we talk about affordable, we also talk about people who would like to buy part of their properties. I think that it is important as well that we give people the chance to become homeowners, especially in an area where houses are so expensive. I will be speaking more about Gorse Ride later.

42.10 Maria Gee asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

With the closure of the Denmark Street car park there have been a few nasty incidents in the Cockpit Path car park as there aren't many parking spaces. My residents are becoming a little disappointed with the action taken by the Council to sort out the Denmark Street car park. It has been mentioned in this meeting that avenues have been explored, but we can't see any avenues which are open to the Council. Just yesterday, the developers stated that they are going to put in a new application. What avenues have been explored by the Council and when did the Council start exploring these avenues?

Answer

We have been looking at all sorts of things. I don't intend to go into too much detail as some of them include very complex legal advice. We have been looking at this for some time. We cannot stop anyone from putting in a planning application. They can do that any time they want. I think I made that clear when I answered an earlier question. Let's wait and see what happens. I don't intend to go into detail here because it was a very complex piece of legal advice. We will do what we can as soon as we can.

42.11 Imogen Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I have Wokingham train station in my ward. Around the station we have a number of streets that suffer from all-day commuter parking. We have had two petitions recently, one for Tanhouse Lane garages and one for Caroline Drive. There has also been one in the past for Meadow Road. I would like to know what the Council is doing to stop people from parking on these streets all day and why some of the requested single yellow lines have not been implemented.

Answer

I have not seen the specific requests for those roads but I would be happy to talk to you about them. Yesterday I had a meeting with Angus Ross and some residents about Crowthorne station. They have a very similar problem. The issue is that people are entitled

to park on public roads unless we put parking restrictions in and the downside is that, if we put parking restrictions in what generally happens is that they move to another road. So, it is a very difficult problem to solve but I would be happy to come and talk to you about it.

42.12 Gregor Murray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

I am sure that you are aware that recently a fire broke out in a nursery school in my ward. Can you update the residents of Norreys on the action the Council is taking to keep this vital service open for local parents and their children?

Answer

The Ashridge Nursery is not owned by the Council. It is privately owned and is run by a local management company. When we found out that there had been a fire senior Officers contacted the nursery and offered help and support and are presently negotiating an area within the Brambles, the Children's Centre, for use by the nursery. As yet, we do not know the cause of the fire. We do know that 80% of the premises suffered smoke damage. So they may be at the Brambles for some time.

42.13 Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

When will the bridge in Winnersh Meadows, over the pond, be repaired? It has been broken for three years. The bridge is used by schoolchildren to look at pond life.

Answer

I wasn't aware of this. I will look into it and come back to you.

43. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

John Halsall, Leader of the Council

During the last three months since you honoured me as Leader of the Council, I continue to be astounded by the high quality of our Officers, their commitment and the breadth of their engagement. They are well motivated, positively addressing issues and have a can-do attitude, which is pervading everything we do. The sparks given from the blue-sky thinking is electrifying. We have been able to achieve a huge amount in a very short time. It is a compliment to Susan Parsonage and her Team and the Executive.

Only last Thursday, as UllaKarin mentioned, within hours of a fire at a private nursery we had mounted an exercise to where they could be open on the following Monday, which is a great compliment to our Officers.

Of course, we do not have the powers to do everything and cannot resolve every problem. Some of our Members who constantly criticise Officers in the Council would do well to remember that. However, the Borough is there to serve residents and improve the quality of the lives of the residents. Our Officers are fully committed to do just that and do an excellent job.

Coming around the corner – maybe or probably – will be Brexit. The merits of or not are not for here. However, we have been planning in the event of leaving without a comprehensive withdrawal agreement for some considerable time. A wide-ranging risk register has been established by a cross-functional team of Officers under the chairmanship of our Resilience Manager and are in the process of enacting robust countermeasures. The process is integrated with the national preparations. At the last time of asking these preparations are restricted, so I am unable to share them, but I will be doing so through the Leaders and the Executive if relevant as time nears. Pauline Jorgensen will be the Executive Member heading up this activity.

Bridge Farm has been in the Waste and Minerals Plan for many years and it is only now that there has been considerable local opposition. I have been frankly surprised that it was not removed many years ago particularly given the quantity of housing built nearby. However, I can confirm that it has now been removed from the Waste and Minerals Plan. I can also announce that Pauline Jorgensen will be bringing forward a paper to assemble the best legal and planning team that we can muster to contest any appeal which there may be for this and any other important appeal that there may be in the future. Because of these two vital and important activities, I will be working on highways to ensure that the momentum continues and will share this portfolio with Pauline.

Congestion is at the top of the concerns for our residents, which has been well covered by the questions. We can do only what we are doing to expand the network which is building four new roads – however this capacity will be consumed quickly. Wokingham Borough has the highest concentration of vehicles per household in the UK. We are unlikely in the short to medium term to affect this, so we must be smarter in using the roads using technology, planning and information. We are in the process of identifying the sensitive roads (which incidentally does not make the other roads insensitive). We are looking at various technological solutions for switching traffic lights and diverting traffic. In the short term, a sophisticated system is now been used to identify the impact of street works and make them off peak.

We were delighted to receive the 50,000 responses to the consultation. As Wayne said, approximately 95% were against the Government's housing target. The Government is now aware of the strength of feeling. I am very grateful to the residents and Members of this Council who encouraged responses. The next steps are to negotiate with Government our Local Plan Update. I am awaiting imminent dates to see the new ministerial team.

The Climate Change agenda is now very well advanced and including elimination of single use plastics, which we may not get to the Motion tonight. Primary health concerns are being pointed out to the CCG in a new forum of WBC, NHS and CCGs. New initiatives are being planned for fly-tipping, travellers and vandalism.

Finally, the Council response to the Heathrow consultation was the support of the Council to be conditional on the need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases including carbon emissions, not the status quo, the need to reduce the current emissions, and to demonstrate a clear pathway to carbon neutrality by all means, which may include offsetting, it being demonstrated through monitoring that a suitable site within the Borough that any increase in the proposed number of overflights in Wokingham Borough will have no adverse effect on the health and quality of life of residents. The need for Western Rail access and associated improvements to Twyford station. As a Council we must protect

jobs and the economy as well as the environment. It is not a binary choice. We must do them all.

John Kaiser, Executive Member for Finance and Housing

Wokingham Borough Council backed Gorse Ride regeneration programme has taken a significant step forward with the start of construction of the first phase of this £8million scheme.

The former Cockayne Court care home and seven surrounding bungalows were demolished in late 2018 and these will be replaced with 46 new homes ranging from three-bedroom to one-bedroom apartments. Upon completion in late 2020, these new properties will be made available across a range of affordable housing tenures including social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership, as well as purchase by existing homeowners within the Gorse Ride community. The work forms part of a much wider community regeneration project in Finchampstead. In total, the regeneration will provide 280 new social and affordable homes whilst enhancing the community in which they sit. There is a very strong community, as we heard earlier on, within Gorse Ride and this marks the first steps in its regeneration for the existing community as well as for prospective new residents. Council Officers and staff have worked with tenants throughout the planning process. The planning application for Gorse Ride phase two is expected to be submitted in late 2019.

Having a home to live in is a basic human right and no matter what the level of homelessness in the Borough to be homeless means you are 100% homeless, coupled with the impacts of homelessness this can be devastating for individuals and families. Homelessness can affect everything that people do - health, education and employment. Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for the Council. Wokingham Borough is committed to supporting those at risk of homelessness and people who sleep rough. The Council has a new draft strategy. The consultation will run from 9-27 September. The strategy has four key priorities: early intervention and prevention; working towards ending rough sleeping and tackling hidden homelessness (people who are back home and sofa surfing and so on); building more affordable homes; and supporting our vulnerable residents. To address these priorities, the Council is proposing to support development of a night shelter, work with long-term rough sleepers, looking closely at the hidden homeless in the Borough and reducing its use of emergency and temporary accommodation for the homeless.

The last issue I would like to talk about is fly-tipping. It had become all too common an occurrence in parts of the Borough and I would like to announce that in conjunction with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, a new Council initiative to deter fly-tipping. Residents and landowners are inconvenienced. It is dangerous and unsightly, on top of which the cost to the Council in time and money to clear up fly-tipping which could be in worthwhile services such as Adult Social Care and highways. To combat this, the Council will be launching a new project; we will call it Countryside Watch, looking to reduce fly-tipping in Wokingham, working with land owners, Parish Councils, residents and the Police. With the Council's initiative, we will be looking for a range of measures which will hopefully lead to the reduction of fly-tipping and its consequences. Actions such as warning posters, the sort of 'you are being watched' message, and penalties clearly displayed, supplied to land owners and Parish Councils to display in sites which suffer from persistent fly-tipping. We will investigate the use of covert mobile CCTV; fly-tipping direct line into the Council; encourage residents to report registration numbers and fly-tipping incidents that they might witness, anonymously if they wish to. We will provide leaflets to builders' merchants and other outlets highlighting the Council's large waste

disposal service we offer; education -presenting at schools on general littering; working with the Police to stop vehicles carrying suspect loads. Any companies caught fly-tipping will be blacklisted from the Council's contract list as well as naming and shaming.

UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children's Services

I am pleased to announce that Wokingham Borough Council has now completed the first phase of the expansion of Addington School in Woodley. There are now two new MUGAs (multi use games areas). Sensorial activities are crucial for brain development and therefore a new sensory path which allows for play using our five basic senses has been created. For those that do not know what it is that is touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. We have also extended the car park. The next phase will be to build a single storey block with four class rooms, a cafe and a common room. These improvements to Addington will make it possible for the School to enrol another 50 students next year.

Once again, schools and academies across Wokingham have achieved some outstanding outcomes in external tests and exams, thus making Wokingham one of the best places in the country for children to learn and grow-up. The data in relation to progress 8 is still to be validated and will not be available until later in the year, but I can tell you some of the provisional outcomes of the statutory assessments.

- The EYFS percentage of pupils achieving a Good Level of Development was 77%.
- The Key Stage 1 percentage of pupils achieving expected level or above was:
 - Maths 81% (last year it was 76%);
 - Writing 74% (last year it was 70%);
 - Reading 80% (last year it was 75%)
- The Key Stage 2 percentage of pupils achieving expected level or above:
 - Maths 84% (last year 79%)
 - Writing 84% (last year 78%)
 - Reading 81% (last year 73%)
- Key Stage 4 percentage of pupils achieving 9-4 at GCSE:
 - English 82% (last year 62%)
 - Maths 79% (last year 60%)
 - English and Maths combined 73%
- Key Stage 4 A Level provisional outcomes:
 - A*-C 74%

I hope that you would like to join me in congratulating our children and students because this is a very, very good.

The Northern House School Trust has recently informed the Department for Education and the Regional Schools Commissioner that they would not be able to run the five schools within their Trust. This has resulted in the Regional Schools Commissioner seeking alternative providers. Wokingham has continued to use and support the local provision and currently has about 30 children placed at the school. It is intended that we will continue placing children at the school subject to a new sponsor being found. This forms part of the basis of our long term strategy to make use of local resources to support children with additional needs.

Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Highways and Transport

As you may guess most of my postbag covers three topics; road resurfacing; Congestion and parking. There is a lot of it.

I am pleased to say that we have just published our next quarter's road resurfacing plans which show that we have used available funds, helped by additional Government pothole funding of £1.117m, to make some progress in resurfacing residential roads which previously have failed to meet the threshold for resurfacing in our very constrained financial environment. We also, I am pleased to say, performed 298 repairs in August alone. I am determined to continue to improve the quality of our roads as much as funds allow and we are significantly increasing the funding in the budget next year for road repairs.

John has eloquently covered some of the things that we are doing jointly on congestion so I will not go into that again.

We also recognise that dangerous and illegal parking causes particular concern, especially around school pick up and drop off and we are doing something about it. Enforcement of these transgressions, through fixed penalty notices, can only be carried out by the Police but I am pleased to announce that we have gained agreement from the Police that we can now introduce Parking Information Notices (PINs) which will allow our Officers to ticket cars that are parking on corners and on pavements. Details of locations and vehicles involved will be collected and passed to the Police to take action as they deem necessary. We will pilot a PIN scheme from October this year and review the success of this at the end of the year with the intention of continuing it if it proves successful. We will also increase the number of Parking Enforcement Officers by six in order to respond to residents' demands for improved enforcement and to allow us to improve enforcement and safety around schools in particular.

Parry Batth, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure

I would just like to draw your attention to some of the initiatives that I would like to put in place to help the residents of the Borough.

My colleague and friend, Councilor John Kaiser has already outlined an action plan for fly-tipping and I totally and whole heartedly support that. We will be putting that into action very, very soon and hoping that this action plan will go a long way to either dramatically reduce or get rid of the ugly fly-tipping in the Borough.

Food waste collections, I have already talked about. These have gone well during the first quarter and approximately 6% of food waste has added to a 56% overall recycling rate in the first quarter with tonnages holding up in the second quarter which is July and August. Plans are now being put in place to start collections in flats in a coordinated way from 1st October.

Rats, we have had quite a few problems with rats. We are aware that there are a number of areas in the Borough experiencing significant problems and we are looking to establish a cross agency approach to address this issue and are hoping to include Thames Water. The first meeting of the Officer group will take place very, very soon and we will work up an action plan about which we will brief you about in due course.

Lastly, the new Bulmershe Leisure Centre, which is taking shape very nicely. It is well on course for completion, hopefully in the Spring of next year. The new facility will be wonderful news for the Borough residents who can look forward to a six-lane 25 metre pool and ancillary facilities for the residents to enjoy.

44. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Charles Margetts, Non-Executive Director, Optalis:

I just want to update you on the progress within Optalis. The transfer of statutory services back to WBC from Optalis is running to schedule. The TUPE consultation is underway and we expect the staff to transfer on 1 November. This will create one clear care pathway for Wokingham residents and will improve the quality of service that we offer.

We are also resetting the structures of the governance of the company in agreement with our partners at RBWM. The new strategy of the company will be focused on efficiency, quality and innovation rather than growth. The governance of the company has been slimmed down to give more control to the Executive and senior officers. This is more efficient and enables the company to react quicker to changes in the market. Recruitment for a new CEO will shortly be underway. We will then begin the process of making the provider services as efficient as possible and will benchmark them against the market place to ensure that the tax payer always gets the best value for money and the resident always get the best quality of care. Plans are underway right through to 2022. These steps have created immediate, significant, in year efficiencies. Once all of this is in place we will be able to use Optalis to increase the range and diversity of care services across the Borough for all of our residents.

John Kaiser, Non-Executive Director Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd:

We are currently looking at what we are doing with the housing companies. As you will probably know, there has been a major change in all the Boards and we are including colleagues from other parts of the Council that will also be involved.

We as a Council actually deliver homes from lots of different areas, believe it or not. We have got regeneration, they deliver their own homes, we have the HRA and we have also got the housing companies. We have got three housing companies and one of them is a registered provider; one of them delivers the actual building of the houses. It does seem strange that we have three areas in the Council that actually does this so what I am trying to do at the moment is to pull together a strategy where we will be able to deliver homes. We will have one place where those homes are delivered, we have our registered provider where those homes will probably be parked which will be affordable homes, and they will be funded in various ways. My ambition with regards to this, I have been told it is too ambitious, but when we look around at what we have got in the pipeline and what we are already doing at the moment, I do not think it is. The ambition is 145. Basically that is for us to deliver a thousand homes in 4 years making a return of 5%. I believe that is perfectly possible. We have already got the houses that we are building for the town centre which is around 100 plus. We have got other sites that we are looking at and I think we are probably going to be achieving that.

It is very important that we use all the advice, all the resources that we have got within the Council. It works together. We should be using the same accountancy staff, using the same consultancy staff, even the same auditors we should be using. We really do have to have a commitment to the residents in this Borough to providing the affordable homes that we know are needed in this Borough due to the very high house prices. This will be going through and we will be starting next week at the first Board meetings at WHL. That will then filter down to Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes as well, so we have a very exciting future in front of us with regards to providing homes. I mean if you go to the 1950s, it was Councils that provided homes. It was the Councils that through the New Towns Development Agency, the only time 300,000 homes had been delivered was when

they were being delivered by Councils so it is not something that is unusual. We just need to get back into the habit again.

45. MOTIONS

46. MOTION 420 SUBMITTED BY PAUL FISHWICK

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Paul Fishwick and seconded by Sarah Kerr.

“National statistics indicate that emissions from transport continue to grow - increasing by four percent overall since 1990, including by six percent since 2013.

Road transport is the primary source of this increase. Whereas vehicles have become more fuel efficient this has been offset by increased travel demand.

These emissions are a key pollutant to the air that we breathe, causing major environmental and health issues. The negative impacts on the environment include the direct effects of pollutants on vegetation, and indirect effects on the acid and nutrients status of soils and ground and surface water.

In terms of health, in 2016 a landmark report published by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health suggested that ‘...every year in the UK, outdoor pollution is linked to around 40,000 deaths’ ... and that ‘...air pollution can have a damaging effect from when a baby is in the womb and continue throughout life to older age, playing a role in many chronic conditions such as cancer, asthma, heart diseases and neurological changes linked to dementia’.

This report concluded that "Real change will only occur when everyone accepts this responsibility and makes a concerted effort."

As the Highway Authority, Wokingham Borough Council has a specific duty to bring forward measures to improve air quality.

Wokingham Borough Council has three declared Air Quality Management Areas but tackling the overall poor air quality across our Borough is the key objective.

There are significant opportunities for sustainable transport options to simultaneously support clean economic growth, increase physical activity, and reduce emissions contributing to local air pollution.

This Council commits to introduce a Low Emissions Transport Strategy that will sit under the Local Transport Plan and will include clearly stated objectives, SMART targets, strategies and tactics”.

It was moved by Gregor Murray and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the Motion be amended by deleting the words “Low Emissions Transport Strategy” in the final paragraph and inserting the words “Strategy to lower transport emissions”.

The amendment to the Motion was accepted by the proposer of the original Motion and, therefore, became the substantive Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, the amended (substantive) Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: National statistics indicate that emissions from transport continue to grow - increasing by four percent overall since 1990, including by six percent since 2013.

Road transport is the primary source of this increase. Whereas vehicles have become more fuel efficient this has been offset by increased travel demand.

These emissions are a key pollutant to the air that we breathe, causing major environmental and health issues. The negative impacts on the environment include the direct effects of pollutants on vegetation, and indirect effects on the acid and nutrients status of soils and ground and surface water.

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There are significant opportunities for sustainable transport options to simultaneously support clean economic growth, increase physical activity, and reduce emissions contributing to local air pollution.

This Council commits to introduce a Strategy to lower transport emissions that will sit under the Local Transport Plan and will include clearly stated objectives, SMART targets, strategies and tactics”.

47. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

At this point in the meeting, 10:10pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Lindsay Ferris.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

48. MOTION 421 SUBMITTED BY IAN PITTOCK

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Ian Pittock and seconded by Paul Fishwick.

“This Council does not support the expansion of Heathrow Airport”.

At this point in the meeting, 10.25pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.13.12, the Council considered a Motion to adjourn the debate on the Motion to the next meeting of the Council. The Motion was proposed by Andy Croy and seconded by Shirley Boyt.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

49. MOTION 422 SUBMITTED BY GREGOR MURRAY

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

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