

EXECUTIVE – 8 OCTOBER 2020

QUESTIONS

Executive Summary

The following questions have been received under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules. The replies by the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holders are set out below.

1. Question from Ms Bernadette Fischler

“In your answer to question 4 from 30 July 2020 you say that “the Council has no interest in the company called “Goldsworth Road Development”LLP”. The Council has entered into a development agreement with the company”.

My question is why has Woking Council entered a development agreement with Goldsworth Road Development LLP even though the planning application for the development in question with reference number PLAN/2020/0568 has not yet been discussed and approved? Why has this contractual agreement been entered and what does it contain?”

Reply by Councillor A Azad

“The Council entered into a development agreement with the previous joint owners Southern Star and Wilmott Dixon that the current owners have inherited. It provided for the Council to consider the use of its Compulsory Purchase Powers to assemble the site for development. The site has been assembled on a voluntary basis and it is understood that it is unlikely that the Council will be requested to use its powers.”

2. Question from Ms Helen Boughton

“I wish to know why Woking Council have entered into a development agreement with Goldsworth Road Development LLP as stated in the minutes linked below, even though the planning application for the development in question with reference number PLAN/2020/0568 has not yet been considered and approved/dismissed. I am referring to question 4 from these minutes:

<https://moderngov.woking.gov.uk/documents/b3386/Item%207%20-%20Questions%2030th-Jul-2020%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>

Why has this contractual agreement been entered into, and what does it contain?”

Reply by Councillor A Azad

“I refer to my answer to Question 1.”

3. Question from Mr Nicholas Hooper

“Following on from your answer to question 12 from 10 September can you please clarify if any companies owned by Woking Borough Council (WBC) or any other vehicles associated with WBC have provided or facilitated funding for Greening Goldsworth Road?”

Reply by Councillor A Azad

"I refer in part to my answer to Question 1. In addition the Council has resolved to support the provision of a new premises for the York Road Project which it will purchase from the developer."

4. Question from Mr Nicholas Hooper

"Also, has WBC through any means provided support or given commitment in any way? (That could also include non-financial support, for example, building a road just for them or helping them with services, etc.)"

Reply by Councillor A Azad

"I refer to my answer to Question 1 and Question 3. The road works being pursued by the Council are related to the development of Victoria Square and the widening of Victoria Arch."

5. Question from Mr Nicholas Hooper

"And lastly, I would like to know how WBC has verified independently that viability is a sound reason to relax the criteria of 40% affordable homes for Greening Goldsworth Road and to allow on the basis of viability only 5% of affordable homes."

Reply by Councillor A Azad

"The Council's Planning Policy provides for the viability assessments made by applicants to be reviewed by independent advisors. This review is ongoing and will be reported to the Planning Committee when the application is considered."

6. Question from Ms Linda Murray

"I have looked at the plans for the Goldsworth Rd development and the Sustainability statement Greening Goldsworth road and I have a comment and questions arising from the information in the statement.

I note that the Woking 2050 Climate Policy document states the following as one of its aims – Woking 'has a built environment that is developed sustainably, which meets local needs and enables the local economy to prosper.'

Would kindly tell me how this is going to be met in the context of this development?"

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

"The proposals are being considered as part of the Application that will be determined by the Planning Committee. It is understood that the applicant has taken account of the Council's Climate Change ambitions, the requirement to reduce flood risk, the creation of pedestrian areas free of traffic and appropriate planting and screening."

7. Question from Ms Linda Murray

“Climate South East predicts that the south east of England is likely to see greater volatility of weather by the 2050s – more intense downpours, more severe droughts and floods, and more extreme heatwaves. Essentially we are due to see more extremes in weather with an increase in temperature and rainfall variability, together with more frequent and extreme summer heatwaves and very wet winters. Summer temperatures are predicted to increase by 2.8%; winter rainfall is predicted to increase by 16%.

It states in the executive summary - The site is at a ‘very low risk of flooding’ - what about the risk of flash flooding, what steps are being taken with street drainage and other flood prevention measures to prevent flash flooding given the climate change predictions set out as follows in the Woking Climate Policy 2050? I note that the WBC is already dealing with overflowing drains in some areas of the Borough including those close to the development. There are existing problems with the drain in Oaks Rd close to my property and the development which regularly overflows with heavy rain and floods the street near my home.”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“I refer to my answer to Question 6. The Scheme, if approved, will incorporate extensive flood attenuation and reduce the rainwater run off to below that currently experienced from the site.”

8. Question from Ms Christine Murphy

“I wish to put these formal questions to the executive of the council, my questions arise from the information in the statement, Greening Goldsworth Rd sustainability statement.

Page 9 ‘Preference will be given to the use of local materials and suppliers, where viable, to reduce transport distances and support the local economy. Any opportunities to re-use and/or recycle materials will be identified and pursued, where feasible’.

Can more detail be given of target for recycled materials, how does this compare to the current standard in construction for reusing and recycling materials.”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“The document referred to by Ms Murphy was submitted as part of the planning application for the proposed Goldsworth Road development. It will be considered by the Planning Committee, so it is not appropriate for me to comment on it.”

9. Question from Ms Christine Murphy

“What controls will the developers put in place with their main contractor to ensure that the materials will be sourced locally where “viable”. Does that mean if it is the cheapest option yes they will source locally but otherwise they source on price and convenience? Why can't all the timber being used be FSC standard for timber, as it is the most robust certification for timber currently?”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“This will be for the developer to consider if planning permission is granted and implemented.”

10. Question from Ms Christine Murphy

“Page 16 The proposed dwellings will be provided with private and semi-private open space including communal garden, roof gardens and public amenity spaces at level 3.

Regarding the private space – will all residents have private space if not what proportion won't, are these mostly balconies? ground floor gardens? With regard to the communal gardens or roof gardens What is the size of the spaces in square meters per number of households and will all households have access? What is the size of the public amenity space?”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“I refer to my reply to Question 8.”

11. Question from Ms Anne Sauer

“Is the Executive still of the view that Victoria Square is intended to be the focal point of the Woking townscape, as originally promoted when the development was seeking planning approval?”

Reply by Councillor D J Bittleston

“Victoria Square was not promoted as a focal point of the Woking landscape but as a benchmark for the quality of future development and as a signal to attract developers to help meet Woking's development needs.”

12. Question from Ms Martine Cooper

“Is it still the view of the Executive, that the Victoria Square development is still considered to be the focal point of the Woking townscape as originally advertised?”

Reply by Councillor D J Bittleston

“I refer to my reply to Question 11.”

13. Question from Ms Lydia Meyler

“I have been looking at the plans for the Goldsworth Road development and the sustainability statement 'Greening Goldsworth Road'.

Page 13 of the sustainability statement promotes bike storage and provision of bicycle lanes, which is welcome. However, how will the proposed A320 road widening scheme around Goldsworth Rd/ Victoria Sq. improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians? What is the target for residents to car share, and how will this be promoted?”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“I refer to my reply to Question 8.”

14. Question from Ms Lydia Meyler

“The proposals for more pedestrianisation and more cycling routes as part of ‘Greening Goldsworth Road’ are positive - but what are the details of how the proposed cycle route will connect with other town centre routes to make cycling a safe and pleasant experience? Will the current time restrictions on cycling in the town centre (eg no cycling along Commercial Way from 10am - 4pm) be changed to accommodate all day cycling?”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“I refer to my reply to Question 8.”

15. Question from Mr Patrick Lonergan

“In view of other mega developments being proposed for the town centre, how does the Leader of the Council and the CEO intend to protect the potential negative commercial and negative aesthetic impact on Victoria Square, which has been built at huge expense to the public purse?”

Reply by Councillor D J Bittleston

“Victoria Square was promoted as a benchmark for the quality of future development and as a signal to attract developers to help meet Woking’s development needs. The scale of recent applications is consistent with that policy objective and will not have a negative impact on Victoria Square.”

16. Question from Mr Caspar Gray

“My question is regarding the Greening Goldsworth Road Development (PLAN/2020/0568) and whether there are any parallels with UA44 and the push to get the development to planning prior to the DPD being approved?”

Reply by Councillor G S Cundy

“The Council has an obligation to determine planning applications that are submitted, and to do so expeditiously. Government legislation sets out the process to be followed in determining planning applications, including the time within which the application should be determined. The application will be determined on its own merits. The fact that the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) is being prepared cannot be sufficient justification to delay determination of the application. The preparation of the Site Allocations DPD has reached a stage that it is given significant weight for the purposes of determining planning applications, and will be taken into account. Failure to determine the application could lead to an appeal on the basis of non-determination and an award of cost for being unreasonable.”

17. Question from Ms Keiko Abe Gray

“My question is whether the Executive is still of the view that Victoria Square is supposed to be the focal point of the Woking townscape as originally advertised?”

Reply by Councillor D J Bittleston

“I refer to my reply to Question 11.”

18. Question from Mr David Sutton

“As a resident it has been very pleasing to see the vast improvements made to the town centre over the past few years, the new buildings at Victoria Square look stunning. Has any measurement been made of the indirect contribution to the town centre economy from the many people who are working on these major projects? What impact will there be if new projects continue to be turned down in the town centre?”

Reply by Councillor K M Davis

“I am glad that you consider the new Victoria Square development as “stunning”. I consider the addition of the Victoria Square development to be extremely beneficial to the town and to the Borough in terms of economic activity for many years to come. An economic assessment for Victoria Square was submitted as part of the planning process in 2013. However a further assessment has not been undertaken since. It is apparent that the workers on the various construction sites in Woking have been beneficial to the local economy, over 1700 jobs have been created, 450+ of them locally and the project has estimated a GVA (Gross Value Added) Economic output uplift of £35m per annum during the construction period. There will be fluctuations to these figures due to Covid-19.

It is not my role to speculate on the future decisions taken by the Planning Committee. However it is important that Woking’s economy continues to grow and flourish and I will use my best endeavours to ensure this is achieved.”

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Ray Morgan, Chief Executive
Email: ray.morgan@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333
Douglas Spinks, Deputy Chief Executive
Email: douglas.spinks@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3440
Peter Bryant, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Email: peter.bryant@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3030
Leigh Clarke, Director of Finance
Email: leigh.clarke@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3277
Louise Strongitharm, Director of Housing
Email: louise.strongitharm@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3599
Julie Fisher, Director of Community Services
Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3301
Geoff McManus, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Email: geoff.mcmanus@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3707

Contact Person: Peter Bryant, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Email: peter.bryant@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3030
Geoff McManus, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Email: geoff.mcmanus@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3707
Chris Norrington, Business Liaison Manager
Email: chris.norrington@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3900
Ernest Amoako, Planning Policy Manager
Email: ernest.amoako@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3427

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Bittleston
Email: clldavid.bittleston@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Ayesha Azad
Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Graham Cundy
Email: cllrgraham.cundy@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Kevin Davis
Email: cllrkevin.davis@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Graham Chrystie
Email: cllrgraham.chrystie@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Ken Howard
Email: cllrken.howard@woking.gov.uk

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