

COUNCIL – 21 JULY 2022

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 21 JULY 2022

The following questions have been received under Standing Order 8.1. The draft replies, which are subject to amendment, are set out below.

“Councillors are thanked for their questions.”

1. Question from Councillor Andy Caulfield

“Most Councillors use social media to engage with residents and keep them updated on Council matters. For the most part it is a positive tool, however, social media can quickly become a hostile place and comments can often become personal. Please can you provide reassurance that Social Media guidance shall be provided to Councillors?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Yes.

As part of an ongoing review of the Council’s governance arrangements, including a review of the Council’s Constitution, social media guidance for Councillors is currently being finalised by Officers. Given the importance of this guidance it has been scheduled to be considered at the next meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee.”

2. Question from Councillor Adam Kirby

“One of our three pledges as Liberal Democrats in the recent election was about climate change. Please can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on what action has or will be taken to improve the Council’s response to the climate emergency?”

Reply from Councillor Rob Leach

“Climate Change is a priority for the Liberal Democrat Administration and has been supplemented within the Woking for All Strategy (2022-2027) and the supplementary and amended priorities as set out by the new administration for 2022-23 and adopted by the Executive on 16 June 2022. These include:

- Completion of an independent assessment of the Council’s corporate carbon footprint so that we can improve the Council’s knowledge of its environmental impact. This will help to further identify key areas of focus, in order to reach our net zero target by 2030.
- Delivery of actions within the Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Working with partners to continue to deliver household energy efficiency improvements and tackle fuel poverty.
- Continuing work through Planet Woking, to sustain a programme of online climate and biodiversity focused resources and events.
- Support the delivery of the county programme to trial kerbside EV points.
- Greater emphasis on initiatives that will support active travel - making journeys by physically active means, like walking or cycling - including extra work in partnership with Surrey County Council to attract additional funding that will support the delivery of the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan.
- Completion of the £3m grant funded energy efficiency project to connect Midas House and Export House to the Thameswey heat network.
- Explore how we can provide improved safer cycle parking.

This Administration will work cross party through the Greener Woking Working Group to ensure these important priorities are delivered.”

3. Question from Councillor Peter Graves

“I was pleased to see that the Council’s June Executive meeting agreed to invest money into improving St Michael Church in Sheerwater.

However, we are all aware of the tough financial position facing the new administration. Please can the Portfolio Holder reassure local residents and I that this investment in St Michael’s is affordable?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“The Sheerwater Project has budgeted for a range of community investment. This is much needed in the area, to support residents and reduce health inequalities for generations to come. Plans for the Health and Community Campus are developing as per the Executive Paper and currently Officers are in the process of writing and submitting a bid to the Levelling Up Fund to further support the costs of this. The original plan for St. Michael’s, supporting the extensive community work they do for Sheerwater, was to demolish and rebuild the Centre which would have cost circa £3m. Following a review of the existing site and the service needs, a refurbishment and extension has been proposed and this is more cost effective and affordable, saving over £1m from the project funds. This will enable the community provision to continue, and grow, with the Council retaining oversight of this through a Community Use Agreement.”

4. Question from Councillor John Morley

“Please can the portfolio holder confirm what will be the maximum height limits on the new developments if the masterplan is approved? Please can the portfolio holder also confirm that the consultation on the masterplan will be wide enough to ensure every local resident can have their say?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The Tall Buildings Framework contained in the Masterplan identifies a range of appropriate prospective heights for areas within in the Town Centre based on a character assessment of that area. Proposed heights differ significantly and in the few cases where they are towards the top of the range this is mostly because of the heights of those buildings already developed such as New Central, Victoria Square or have planning permission for them such as the Goldsworth Road development which was allowed on appeal. For the sites covered by the Site Specific Guidance, the highest buildings proposed by that Guidance would be 15 storeys. Full details can be found in the draft Masterplan. It should be noted that this strategy guidance should be used as a guide and not a blueprint, but it has been informed by detailed analysis of existing heights and associated urban analysis of the centre and, once the guidance is adopted, the Council will expect new development proposals to generally conform to this building height and townscape strategy guidance.

In relation to consultation a comprehensive consultation plan has been prepared which outlines the consultation and engagement activities planned, to raise awareness of the Masterplan to all residents. This will include publicity, event roadshows across the Borough and a consultation pop up shop as well as information being posted on the community hub and Council websites. To reflect the priority given to the Masterplan by the Council, the consultation will far exceed usual consultation procedures and cover a 12 week period. The report to Executive set out the full details of the consultation strategy.”

5. Question from Councillor Guy Cosnahan

“I have spoken to many residents in Heathlands who are concerned about the potential road closure of the A320 for the Housing Infrastructure Fund scheme.

When the road under Victoria Arch was closed for three weeks in May and June, it increased journey times from Barnsbury, Mayford and Sutton Green. The closure also notably increased congestion and traffic on Triggs Lane.

Please will the Portfolio Holder agree that any future road closure for the Housing Infrastructure Scheme needs to take into account concerns of residents in Heathlands and not unreasonably add to local congestion and journey times?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“Woking Borough Council’s Executive meeting held last week on 14th July resolved to pause and review the Victoria Arch widening project until there is a plan in place that fits our budget and meets local needs. In presenting that paper I explained to the Executive that the current proposal would see the road closed for 2.5 years and closed to pedestrian and cyclists for 7 months. I expressed our concerns about how damaging this would be for the town at this time, while it is still recovering from covid. A closure of this scale would be potentially detrimental and undesirable at this time. The implications of a road closure would be the diversion of traffic to other points on the road network increasing pressure on those points and increasing travel time. A key element of the scope of the review of the project is an understanding of the economic and social impact to understand fully the implications of the closure. Further, the recent road closure was supported by road surveys which were undertaken to inform the project of the impacts on the road route diversions. This survey information is currently being assessed. A further report is coming back to the Executive in November 2022 to update on the outcomes of the project review.”

6. Question from Councillor Andy Caulfield

“Following requests from Councillors and local residents, I was pleased to see that seating was installed last week in Henry Plaza.

Please can the Portfolio Holder consider reinstating seating in Wolsey Place that was removed during the pandemic?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“I have been asking about plans for seating in Henry Plaza and I’m delighted to see that this has now happened and even more delighted to see visitors taking advantage. This current seating in Henry Plaza is temporary while further plans are developed for the space. I have asked that seating is reviewed in the former Wolsey Place – particularly where there were previous benches and hope to see those benches in place soon.”

7. Question from Councillor Josh Brown

“Woking has an immense amount of history, culture and talent among its residents both past and present.

One example would be Henry Plaza, being named after the former Mayor and Councillor for West Byfleet, Henry Cawsey.

Will the Portfolio Holder agree to take steps to install information points across key landmarks, informing residents of the historical significance of their name?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“I join Councillor Brown in celebrating the many talented, hard working and brave residents of the Borough recognised through place names and other means. Early this year saw the unveiling of a statue of Dame Ethel Smyth to celebrate her life and recognise the important work she did for women’s rights and equality. I have asked officers to investigate opportunities and where possible and where funding allows implement such a suggestion where appropriate. I’d ask Members to volunteer ideas to me so that I may share with officers.”

8. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“Under the Public Spaces Protection Order put in place last December to combat antisocial activities in Woking Town Centre, how many people have been arrested for persistent offending given the adverse impact such behaviour has and is causing to businesses and restaurants?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“The Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) came into force in Woking town centre in February 2022. The process for enforcing the PSPO was set out in a paper to the Executive, of which Cllr Davis was a member, in November 2021. Namely:

‘3.1 Surrey Police will have delegated authority to enforce the PSPO within Woking and they will be the primary enforcers of the order. Enforcing officers will follow guidance issued by Surrey Police and supply personal details of the offender and supporting evidence of the breach to the local authority, Woking Borough Council (WBC), to issue warning letters or FPNs if appropriate.

3.2 Relevant agencies such as social services or the youth offending team will also be made aware of the breaches if appropriate.

3.3 Where a person has been dealt with for more than two breaches resulting in FPNs being issued, consideration should be given to a Community Harm and Risk Management Meeting (CHaRMM) referral so that options can be discussed to tackle the issues linked to the person continuing to offend. This could include support/intervention or enforcement options such as an ASB Injunction or Criminal Behaviour Order.’

Since the order came into force 6 individuals have been cautioned for breaching the order once, and 1 individual has been cautioned for breaching the order twice. The latter individual has not returned to Woking town centre. Police have also seized and confiscated alcohol and required individuals to leave the area. Where individuals comply in this way it is not deemed to be a breach of the order. We are awaiting more detailed data from Surrey Police on the use of PSPO powers. This information will be circulated to councillors once the Council is in receipt of the data.

I share Cllr Davis’ frustration and have huge sympathy for the local businesses affected by anti-social behaviour.”

9. Question from Councillor Gary Elson

“Woking Residents welcome the resumption of the regular Green Waste Collection Service however JWS are advising that they are currently unable to accept any applications from new subscribers and that the advice is to register on the ‘waiting list’.

Please can the Portfolio Holder advise when JWS will be in a position to offer the service to new customers?”

Reply from Councillor Rob Leach

“The Council is committed to providing a high quality, robust and reliable service to our residents and looks forward to opening up the green waste service to new customers in the near future. Following a range of incentives, the number of HGV drivers employed on the waste collection contract is increasing but has not yet fully recovered. Despite this deficit the fortnightly garden waste service has resumed and the Council and its Joint Waste Solutions partnership are continuing to monitor the service’s resilience.

Whilst we are eager to accept new garden waste subscribers at the earliest opportunity, it is important that this is managed carefully and in conjunction with the efforts to stabilise driver numbers. Residents wishing to join the service can register their interest online and will receive notification once the service becomes available to join.

In relation to the resilience of the service, I have been informed that strike action by Amey employees working on the waste collection and street cleaning services in Elmbridge and Surrey Heath could take place from Monday 1 August to Friday 19 August, following a GMB union ballot.

Currently it is not known what form the action may take, nor the extent of its impact for Woking. I will provide further information when available.”

10. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“The Liberal Democrat Administration has committed in their Woking for All strategy to securing "infrastructure" for the East of the Borough. As the term "infrastructure" is quite vague, can they clarify what sort of infrastructure will that be?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The Council at its meeting on 3 December 2020 resolved that ‘(the) Council calls for a joint study with other authorities and partners on the future infrastructure requirements of the east of Woking based on both current and future demand. Subsequent reports were presented to the Executive on 9 September 2021 and approved by Council on 14 October 2021 (in relation to transport, education, flooding and health) and the Executive on 20 January 2022 and Council on 10 February 2022 (in relation to Social and Community Infrastructure; Public Services (including emergency services); Utilities; and Green Infrastructure). Given the current community’s needs and the scale of housing planned within the Local Plan for the east of the Borough it is now critical that infrastructure comes forward to meet the needs of the current and future community. In addition, the Liberal Democrat Administration has further given its commitment to fund its agreed share of the flood relief works in Byfleet and work with the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council to support the delivery of a viable scheme.”

11. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“We welcome the fact that the Town Centre Masterplan will shortly be going out to public consultation. We encourage all residents to engage with the process, as we ourselves intend to do. Given that the Planning Portfolio holder has let it be known on several occasions that he is uncomfortable with the height limits as suggested in the Masterplan, can he give us an indication of what he would like the height limits to be?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Woking Borough Council’s Executive meeting held last week on 14th July resolved to approve the draft Woking Town Centre Masterplan for consultation. In presenting this Masterplan both the Leader of the Council and I set out our disappointment that the previous administration had not progressed the Masterplan and had given developers a free reign to reach for the sky. This administration made a firm commitment to deliver the Masterplan as many residents were concerned about ultra high developments; I share those concerns and that is why, following detailed input from me, Cllr Morales and with support from the officer team a number of key changes were made to the Masterplan. For sites which are covered by the Site Specific Guidance, the highest buildings proposed by that Guidance would be 15 storeys. With the endorsement of the Local Development Framework Working Group, I am comfortable with the proposals set out and delighted that we will be shortly seeking views from residents and others on the proposals over a 12 week consultation process.”

12. Question from Councillor Melanie Whitehand

“Given the unprecedented hot weather being experienced locally, will the Council be reinstalling the water stations in the Town Centre that were in place before when a similar hot spell occurred which proved to be extremely useful in helping residents combat dehydration?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Officers are actively working with the Council’s suppliers to bring into operation three bottle filling points within the Town Centre. These will be conveniently placed for the public to access, helping people to save money whilst staying hydrated when they are out and about, and reduce their environmental footprint.

Already available is the ‘Refill Woking’ scheme, which has for some years provided an easy way for residents and visitors to Woking and West Byfleet to locate premises where they can fill up their water bottles for free; look out for the Refill Woking stickers on the windows of participating premises, local participants can also be found via the national Refill app. More information is available through the Refill Woking page on the Council’s website.”

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REPORT ENDS