

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 30 JULY 2020

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 M Ali

“On a like for like basis how do the Sheerwater regeneration proposals compare to before on

- Number of houses
- Number of two bed flats
- Number of one bed flats?”

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

“It is not possible to provide a like-for-like comparison at this stage. A number of the phases within the Sheerwater regeneration are only subject to an Outline planning permission and therefore any mix is indicative. Furthermore, the planning consent does not separate out houses and flats for the outline phases.”

2. Question from Councillor M Ali

“We were under the impression that officers of WBC are appointed as director(s) of Goldev Woking Ltd.

Is anyone from WBC part of Goldev Woking Ltd?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“No.”

3. Question from Councillor K Howard

“Is the portfolio holder aware of concerns that 5G communication wavelengths may be harmful to living things including humans and is it considered likely that any significant number of trees will have to be felled in the Borough to make way for 5G technology?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“World Health Organization (WHO) and Public Health England (PHE) state that they do not believe there is a risk to health with 5G. They say that it is possible there may be a small increase in overall exposure to radio waves when 5G is added to an existing network or in a new area. However, the overall exposure is expected to remain low relative to guidelines and, as such, there should be no consequences for public health. Both WHO and PHE advocate some further research into the possible longer term health effects of all mobile telecommunications and PHE is committed to monitoring the evidence applicable to this and other radio technologies, and to revising its advice, should that be necessary.

Where the installation of 5G technology falls within the control of the planning authority, an assessment will be made on its impact on the siting and design of the apparatus which would include assessing the impact on the landscape and to any trees. Any trees which are subject to tree preservation orders, would require consent from the Council for them to be felled. Where trees not subject to preservation orders, if the Council is made aware that they are under threat, tree preservation orders can be served, if deemed appropriate, to secure their retention.”

4. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Is WBC directly or indirectly a partner in the Goldsworth Road Development LLP or linked to it.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“The Council has no interest in the company called “Goldsworth Road Development” LLP”. The Council has entered into a development agreement with the company.”

5. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Did any WBC officer or Director of WBC owned bodies make any office work related foreign trips outside the UK over the tenure of their appointment so far?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Please see the information attached at Appendix 1 which sets out office work related foreign trips outside the UK undertaken by Officers or Directors of WBC owned bodies.”

6. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Reference to item 5 above are the trips, if any, outside the UK or Republic of Ireland?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Please see the answer to Question 5 above.”

7. Question from Councillor M Ali

“The executive and the Leader called for the approval of some recent plans that were a clear violation of the planning policies of WBC. At the same time we have approved demolishing little huts for children to play and shed like structures in homes as not in line with policy. How does the executive and the leader feel about this? Some residents are calling it preferential, differential treatment. What do you think?”

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

“My recent comments were in respect of the Woking Football Club Stadium proposals. I made them after carefully reading the Planning Officer’s report which recommended that planning consent be granted. The proposed development was not “a clear violation of the planning policies of WBC”; indeed if it had been, there is no way the Planning Officer could have recommended it for approval. I am not aware of the other cases referred to in your question, but the demolition and removal of huts and sheds is a matter for the Planning Committee which takes appropriate action where planning rules and regulations have been breached. This being the case, there is no question of there being “preferential, differential treatment”.”

8. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Has WBC made any payments or equipment or material in any form to Greenfield school since the sensible rejection of the further amount for Greenfield school by the council?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Since the decision by Council not to support the revised proposals by Greenfield School, one advance of £400,000 has been made, in December 2019, within the original Executive approved loan facility.”

9. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Have any payments been made or any facilities been lent to Goldev or any party linked to the Woking FC plans?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“No, not in respect of the proposed Woking FC development. However, the Council has a relationship with the Football Club unconnected with the proposed development. By way of example, the Council has made payments to the Football Club to ensure that Sheerwater FC can groundshare at the Laithwaite Community Stadium whilst its new pitch is completed as part of the Sheerwater regeneration scheme.”

10. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Did the council lose any money in the failed plans for Woking FC?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“No.”

11. Question from Councillor M Ali

“What is the council using its property on hillview road for? Is it occupied?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“7 Hill View Road is let to Woking Football Club whilst its potential use for healthcare purposes is assessed.”

12. Question from Councillor M Ali

“What is the total cost of the Harrington place development including all services, management fees, land etc. i.e. the TOTAL cost. What does this total cost equate to price per apartment? i.e. total cost / number of apartments.”

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

“I know Councillor Ali has already asked and obtained answers from officers on in early June this year. The cost of Harrington Place was £62.8m equating to £427k per unit.”

13. Question from Councillor M Ali

“What is the total cost of the house built in lockwood path including all services, management fees, land, road etc. i.e. the TOTAL cost. What does this total cost equate to average price per house? i.e. total cost / number of houses built.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“I know Councillor Ali has already asked and obtained answers from officers on in early June this year. The cost of Lockwood Path was £1.3m equating to £325k per unit (excluding land for which we do not hold a separate valuation).”

14. Question from Councillor M Ali

“What is the strategic objective of the development on lockwood path.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The strategic objective of the development at Lockwood Path is to deliver additional affordable homes to meet local housing need. The scheme has delivered 4 x 3-bedroom council houses at social rents for families waiting on our housing register.”

15. Question from Councillor M Ali

“How many key worker children attend Greenfield school? How many Key worker children did they look after during these Covid times?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“This is a question for Greenfield School. I do not know how many children continued to attend during the lockdown, however children would only have attended if absolutely necessary as the government guidance was that children should stay at home if at all possible.”

16. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Under government guideline is it allowed that WBC borrows money from PWDB or other resources and lends further one?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“The Council can use Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) borrowing to provide loans to other organisations.”

17. Question from Councillor D E Hughes

“Following the discussion on the latest Corporate Peer Challenge report, the previous report was also reviewed in O&S. Can the Council be assured that there was an action plan on these 2015 recommendations and that an implementation plan was completed? If so are these documents available for members to view?”

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

“The previous Corporate Peer Challenge took place in October 2015. The Feedback Report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2016 and the Executive in March (EXE16-024). Council agreed its response to each of the recommendations in April 2016. The implementation of these recommendations is evidenced in subsequent Committee reports in respect of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Transformation Programme, Service Planning and the Investment Programme.”

18. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“Fly tipping is one of the blights of our time. My residents in areas of Goldsworth Park where communal bins are used suffer particularly, not just from some neighbours who don't properly dispose of their rubbish but from organised fly tippers dumping their waste. Will the Portfolio Holder:

- i) Work with New Vision Homes, Thameswey and other housing providers to remind residents of their options for disposing of items not collected by Joint Waste Solutions
- ii) Buy or loan one or more mobile CCTV cameras to place at fly tipping hotspots across the borough to catch repeat perpetrators.”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“i) Ever since I became the Portfolio Holder, I have worked tirelessly with Joint Waste Solutions and Amey to engage proactively with NVH, Thameswey and other Managing, Estate and Letting Agents to overcome site specific issues and to communicate messages surrounding the disposal of wastes, including items which are not accepted in the kerbside bins. I would be happy to work with Cllr. Barker on any specific sites in her Ward if that would be helpful.

- ii) Two mobile CCTV cameras are shared with the local police team, and their deployment is decided at Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings. Cameras have been and continue to be used in locations across the Borough at fly tipping hot spots with various degrees of success. The current mobile camera in position at the Parley Drive recycling site continues to capture flytipping offenders and when possible the appropriate enforcement action is taken.”

19. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“Was an Action Plan or similar document prepared following the LGA peer challenge in 2015?”

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

“Yes (see answer to Q.17).”

20. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“What discussions have been held with Surrey County Council on accessing government funds to make it easier for people to walk and cycle in the borough?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council have been working together to develop a Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LWCIP) for Woking. Surrey County Council was awarded funding by the Department for Transport to work with them on developing this document, one of the first in the UK. Woking’s LCWIP was completed and submitted to the Department for Transport at the end of March 2020 for consideration. If government funding becomes available, the LCWIP will help to identify which measures could be funded to enhance local cycling and walking provision in this area. The LCWIP, and details of other cycling and walking initiatives (current and earlier projects), can be accessed via www.woking.gov.uk/nature-and-sustainability/green-initiatives/cycling-and-walking-initiatives.

In addition, with regard to Active Travel we are seeking to take the opportunity to accelerate the Council’s plans to permanently widen paths and cycle lanes and have asked Surrey County Council to assist us in this endeavour.”

21. Question from Councillor L M N Morales

“Since Council meetings have been virtual no members of the public have been able to attend meetings in person, but have have been able to view all public meetings online. How many views has each meeting had online since the council stopped sitting in the council chamber and how do these numbers compare to the same period last year?”

Reply from Councillor Azad

“Please see the table below which sets out the number of views for each public meeting webcasted since the changes to the Council’s operational arrangements necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic. These meetings are highlighted in grey. The webcasted meetings held in the same period last year are shown underneath for comparison:-

Meeting Type	Date of Meeting	Number of Views
Council	18 June 2020	108
Council	13 June 2019	50
Executive	22 June 2020	256
Executive	27 June 2019	34
Executive	16 July 2020	109
Executive	11 July 2019	48
Overview and Scrutiny	15 June 2020	505
Overview and Scrutiny	17 June 2019	67
Overview and Scrutiny	13 July 2020	122
Overview and Scrutiny	15 July 2019	60
Planning	12 May 2020	194
Planning	3 June 2020	234
Planning	4 June 2019	111
Planning	23 June 2020	1425
Planning	25 June 2019	169
Planning	21 July 2020	77
Planning	23 July 2019	111
Standards and Audit	23 July 2020	40
Standards and Audit	18 July 2019	32

22. Question from Councillor M Ali

“This is a follow on from question 2 of council 25th July 2019 – Can you please share the number of landlord prosecutions and violations per ward prior to the introduction of the Canalside only licensing scheme and the number of prosecutions per ward since the introduction of the Canalside only licensing scheme.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“Between 1 January 2016 and 31 March 2018, our records show there were 10 prosecutions for housing standards issues affecting 9 different properties. 5 of these properties were located in the Canalside Ward, 1 in Goldsworth East, 1 in West Byfleet, 1 in Hoe Valley and 1 in Heathlands. Since the selective licensing scheme was introduced in Canalside on 1 April 2018, there have been no further landlord prosecutions in the Borough. The Housing Standards Team are working in a more proactive and collaborative way with landlords to achieve improved living conditions, including through the selective licensing scheme and individual negotiations following the receipt of service requests.”

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 2 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

“Is there any plan to extend the scheme (in question 1) to the whole borough in order to be fair and not discriminating against one particular ward.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The Canalside ward was chosen for the Selective Licensing pilot due to the high number of private rented properties located within the ward and the amount of prosecution cases the Council had successfully taken against private landlords in this area. It was felt that this part of the Borough had the most potential to achieve the intended outcomes of the Selective Licensing scheme. This was an evidence-based

decision, not to discriminate against a particular ward, but to improve living conditions for those private rented tenants living there.

As the Canalside Selective Licensing pilot progresses over the next 4 years, it will be reviewed to monitor the extent to which it has improved the overall standard of privately rented accommodation and the wider benefits to the designated area. A decision will then be taken on the future of the scheme for Canalside and the rest of the Borough.”

23. Question from Councillor M Ali

“This is a follow on from question 3 of council 25th July 2019 – Under the new waste arrangements the capital costs are on WBC the vehicles, their maintenance etc. taking into account amortisation and the total cost to council are you confirming that we will be saving money despite having to put up money for vehicles, equipment etc. and the subsequent losses? Also consider that the same money spent as capital here could have been put to other earning uses.”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“The Council would either need to lease or purchase vehicles in order to deliver the waste service. It was more cost effective for the Council to purchase the waste collection vehicles rather than lease the vehicles from the contractor. Therefore these are not new costs.”

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 3 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

“What cost savings has the new joint waste scheme made over the years that it has now operated? Please give a cost figure in comparison with pre joint waste costs. Please consider reduced service and additional charges that the public is being forced to put up with. And the fact that now the council pays capital costs for equipment and vehicles.”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“The key saving as a result of the Joint Waste agreement is the guarantee of £100,000 per annum saving on our pre contract cost.

Under the new arrangements there has been no reduced service or additional charges levied by Woking Borough Council. Finally, the financing in relation to equipment and vehicles is consistent on this type of contract with the value being written off over the term of the contract.”

24. Question from Councillor M Ali

“This is a follow on from question 11 of council 25th July 2019 – How many properties / land has WBC given to Thameswey either at price or free or loan .e.g to build upon. What was the WBC purchase costs of these assets (land, houses etc.). This is just a request for a full and honest disclosure rather than a response that tells half the story.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“My answer to your question in July last year set out the properties sold to Thameswey between 2016/17 and 2018/19. The only property sold to Thameswey in 2019/20 was the sale of 37 St Johns Road for £360,000 (Frazer’s Surveyors provided a valuation of £360,000 for the property).”

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 11 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

“How many properties has Woking Council sold to Thameswey group of companies and its subsidiaries and Rutland? What price were they sold at? What were the market

valuations of these? Did we get 3 differences valuations done?"

Reply from Councillor A Azad

"The Council has not sold any properties to the Thamesway group of companies (including Rutland) during the last 2 years. In 2016/17 the Council sold 2 properties, 10 Guildford Road for £618,722 and Five Acres for £925,000, to the Thamesway group at the cost of acquisition by the Council."

25. Question from Councillor M Ali

"This is a follow on from question 12 of council 25th July 2019 – why are the costs for heathside car park not available?"

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

"The demolition and rebuilding of the Heathside Crescent Car Park has not yet been progressed to the point at which a detailed design has been agreed and the project costed."

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 12 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

"What is the anticipated build cost per parking space for the red car park. How does that compare with the build cost per parking space for the Heathside car park?"

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

"In accordance with the Executive report submitted to the Executive the budgeted cost for 1,325 parking spaces in the Victoria Square Red car park is a total of £73m (circa £55,000 per space). No detailed costs are available at this time for the demolition and rebuild of Heathside car park."

26. Question from Councillor M Ali

"This is a follow on from question 16 of council 25th July 2019 – Improve is not the same as solve. Can you confirm that independent studies with realistic traffic number taken into account show that we will have no traffic issues on Victoria way post expansion."

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

"I used the word "improve" rather than "solve" because it depends on what you define as "issues". The advice of the expert highways and transportation consultants is that conditions will be improved."

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 16 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

"Regarding item 14 above can you confirm that your studies prove that expanding the arch will solve traffic problems and not just move them upstream? Reliable sources have told me that you are simply mitigating the issue around the few meters of the arch and move the congestion upstream without a real solution to the problem. Can you confirm there are studies to back up your answer."

Reply from Councillor D J Bittleston

"Expert highways and transportation consultants have prepared proposals which will improve conditions to the south of Victoria Arch."

27. Question from Councillor M Ali

“This is a follow on from question 17 of council 25th July 2019 – Were officers and portfolio holders not aware of the potential losses and what had they done to check that tenancies will not be lost so soon after the purchase resulting in a big gap in public purse.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“On making the decision to acquire the property, the Council was provided with a full list of tenancies which included lease end dates, probability of renewal and comments around any rental guarantees. Some tenant turnover is normal business when managing a property the size of Dukes Court. The property is performing well as has been reported throughout the Council’s ownership in the Green Book.”

The question to which Councillor Ali refers is provided below along with the answer:

Question 17 from Councillor M Ali – Council – 25 July 2019

“Will the Leader please explain why there is such a huge difference in the purchase price and the current valuation of Dukes Court? How did the public purse suffer such a loss, who did the first evaluation? How many evaluations were done originally? and why was such a big mistake made and who is liable for it.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“The valuation of Dukes Court in the financial statements is a valuation prepared for accounting purposes. The method of valuation for accounting purposes is not the same as that used for a purchase report whereby advice is given as to a recommended price that could be paid for an asset by a specific purchaser, not the market value more generally. Valuations for accounting purposes are governed by different rules, regulations and assumptions such as an appropriate yield and the rental income.

The difference to the valuation calculated by Knight Frank on acquisition of the holding company in November 2017 is explained by a difference in both the yield, where a more cautious view is taken, and the rent, where some rents are now no longer under guarantee.

In September 2018 Knight Frank confirmed that the 2017 acquisition price remained appropriate as the value for the property on its sale by the company to WBC.

Whilst the property provides net income to underpin the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy, a key reason for the acquisition was to secure quality office space which might otherwise have been lost to residential conversion. This is not reflected in an accounting valuation based on existing leases and ignoring any special assumptions or special purchaser status which a purchase report would include.

The price paid was not a mistake and therefore there is no liability. The asset is currently performing well as reported monthly in the Green Book.”

28. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Was the proposed loan to Greenfield school and the one already given in line with the terms of PWLB?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“The loan support to Greenfield School, enabling the relocation to a larger site and development of additional facilities, is to meet the Council objective of expanding provision of school places in the Borough. The use of the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) for this purpose is allowed.”

29. Question from Councillor M Ali

“In the budget speech 2020/21 Cllr Azad said ‘rainwater gardens have a significant impact’.

Is this really the case? I am not allowed to say its misleading as that can be classed as an allegation but consider this:

- Rainwaters are not considered a major flood mitigation strategy
- We have only a pilot scheme covering very small areas so for most part of borough the risk remains
- They cannot deal with the floods as seen by us in the past years

Please refer to the excellent presentation given by our competent drainage officer on the topic for correct facts.”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“There are many different options when looking to reduce flood risk depending on the source of flooding and the space available, all Flood Alleviation schemes require multiple different options to help reduce the risk of flooding. Raingardens are one such option and help to reduce the flood risk from surface water flooding which impacted the Rive Catchment in 2016. Depending on the size of raingarden, the space available, the number installed and its location a significant volume of additional surface water storage can be provided within a catchment helping to slow down the rate in which water reaches the bottom of the catchment. The rain garden project is about installing multiple raingardens within the Rive Catchment to slow the rainwater down before it reaches the Rive Ditch, as well as some in the immediate area of the flooding to increase the flood water storage capacity. Due to the urban nature of the Rive Ditch Catchment and the lack of large open spaces within the vicinity of the area impacted by flooding, there are limited options to install large scale river flood defences such as embankments and flood walls, which are normal installed as part of a Traditional River Flooding Scheme such as those installed for the Hoe Stream or those being investigated and designed for the River Wey at Byfleet and Old Woking and as such the Rive Catchment requires multiple smaller interventions. Raingardens are one measure that is being implemented in this area as well as ensuring that new development within the catchment does not increase its surface water runoff from existing and reaches predevelopment rates were practicable.

Although Raingardens are commonly installed in other countries such as America and Australia to reduce the risk of surface water flooding, they are a relatively new concept in the UK. As we are proposing to retrofit the raingardens on highway land removing the traditional drainage gully system we are working closely with Surrey County Council on this project who require the pilot scheme to ensure that maintenance and management of the drainage system is not increased from existing, once the raingardens have been installed and monitored for a number of years (ensuring the costs of maintenance and management are not increased from the traditional System) then it will be possible to look at other areas of the Borough that would benefit from these interventions.”

Date Published:

30 July 2020

REPORT ENDS

Date	Title of Visit	Country	Reason	Officer
March 2006	Conference	Melbourne, Australia	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
24 April 2007	International Conference on Climate Change	Bilbao, Spain	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
3 March 2008	EU Climate Change Committee – SEEDA	Brussels	Meeting	Ray Morgan
27 March 2008	British Embassy Conference	Brno, Moravia	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
2 April 2008	ICLEI Climate Protection & Renewable Energy: Medium and Small Communities Facing the Challenge	Rovigo, Italy	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
22 July 2008	F&CO - Spanish Cities for the Climate Network's General Assembly	San Sebastian, Spain	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
31 March 2009	National Housing Conference - Sustainable Energy Ireland	Sligo, Ireland	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
18-20 November 2009	Amstelveen Conference EU Education and Employment Project	Amstelveen	Participant	Ray Morgan
27 October 2010	Delhi International Renewable Energy Conference	Delhi, India	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
16 November 2010	International Forum-Exhibition - Climate Change & Industrial City Ecology	Chelyabinsk, Russia	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
28-29 March 2011	Foreign & Commonwealth Visit	Raleigh, North Carolina	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
12 April 2011	Forum Switch on the Earth	Tenerife	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
22-24 July 2011	International Festival - Town Twinning	Rastatt	Participant	Ray Morgan
15-16 November 2011	International Ecological Forum 2011	Ekaterinburg, Russia	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
5-6 December 2011	Xergi Meeting	Aalborg, Denmark	Meeting	Ray Morgan
4-8 June 2012	Climate Change - British Council Visit	India	Guest Speaker	Ray Morgan
19-20 July 2016	Victoria Square Development- Limestone Quarry Visit	Munich, Germany	Visit	Ray Morgan, Douglas Spinks Chris Dale
23-24 January 2018	Board Meeting of Council owned company (Dukes Court Owner T – Sarl)	Luxembourg	Meeting	Ray Morgan Peter Bryant
18-19 April 2018	Victoria Square Development Limestone Quarry Visit	Germany	Visit	Ray Morgan Douglas Spinks

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23 May 2018	Board Meeting of Council owned company (Dukes Court Owner T – Sarl)	Luxembourg	Meeting	Ray Morgan Peter Bryant Leigh Clarke
20 September 2018	Board Meeting of Council owned company (Dukes Court Owner T – Sarl)	Luxembourg	Meeting	Ray Morgan Peter Bryant Leigh Clarke