

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 3 DECEMBER 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 W P Forster

“Following a petition signed by more than 600 people, the Council agreed back in 2016 to install wheelchair accessible equipment in one of the Borough’s play areas. Please can the Council confirm what progress has been made on bringing wheelchair accessible equipment to Woking?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“I am pleased to confirm that inclusive, wheelchair accessible play is being incorporated into the design for the refurbishment of Loop Road Recreation Ground play area. Tenders for this redesign have recently been received and evaluated, and the contract has been awarded to the chosen supplier, KOMPAN Ltd. A public consultation on the proposed design will follow, and barring any significant delay, we would anticipate completion of the new play area in the summer.”

2. Question from Councillor W P Forster

“Please will the Council agree to clean the exterior of the Civic Offices?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Cleaning of the windows has been scheduled for early Spring 2021. Cleaning of the concrete cladding would be expensive and at this time is not considered a financial priority for the immediate forward maintenance programme.”

3. Question from Councillor L S Lyons

“Could I please have a named list of all planning applications approved since 1 May 2012 for developments over 15 x dwellings, detailing the number of dwellings, along with the number/percentage of those dwellings delivered (or due to be delivered) onsite which are affordable, by the current definition of the term?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“The table attached at Appendix 1 provides the answers to Questions 3 and 4 so far as the timescale for response to the question allows. Please note:

1. The figures include only permissions granted for residential schemes of 15 units or more since 1 May 2012. Refusals (including, importantly, applications which were refused due to the insufficient provision of Affordable Housing) do not show in this data. External consultants may have provided viability assessments on such refused schemes.
2. The information excludes Prior Approval Conversions, S.73 applications and Reserved Matters applications.
3. The table lists all consents some of which will have been superseded by subsequent approvals as indicated in the table.

4. It should be noted that the policy threshold for Affordable Housing provision varied in the early part of the period in question and Affordable Housing provision may have been secured (or viability discussions undertaken) on schemes of fewer than 15 units. External consultants may have provided viability assessments on such schemes.
5. The data relates solely to Class C3 residential accommodation and excludes C2 accommodation (except where specifically noted under the Sheerwater Regeneration scheme permissions)."

4. Question from Councillor L S Lyons

"How many affordable homes viability assessments by Kempton Carr Croft have been completed as part of a planning application since 1 May 2012, and how many of them have concluded that the applicant's obligations under CS12 to provide at least 40 per cent affordable homes onsite should be waived?"

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

"Please see my reply to Question 3 above and the table attached at Appendix 1 in respect of approvals. Of those assessed by Kempton Carr Croft there were 13 assessments of which 3 secured additional homes on site, 5 secured additional financial contributions and 5 agreed with the applicant assessment that no affordable could be secured.

In the time available we have not been able to research the records of applications that either did not progress or were refused."

5. Question from Councillor L S Lyons

"How much money has been collected since 1 May 2012 as financial contributions in lieu of providing affordable homes onsite, and how many affordable homes have been delivered as a direct result of that funding?"

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

"The Council has received £9,355,049 in Section 106 affordable housing contributions in lieu of on-site provision since 1 April 2012 (N.B. the figures are recorded by financial year). To date, these funds have contributed towards the completion of 248 affordable homes. These financial contributions are effective in delivering additional affordable homes because they provide a subsidy to bridge the gap between market rents and affordable and/or social rents. Over the period the average subsidy has been circa £38,000."

6. Question from Councillor R N Leach

"In my ward there is a privately owned plot of littered and unmaintained land in private ownership which is surrounded by a well-maintained residential area. At least 7 neighbouring residents have made representations about the state of it. What course of action is appropriate, given that Neighbourhood Officers, Environmental Health and Planning Departments have been unsuccessful in having the land cleared up?"

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

"Officers are continuing to investigate options to prompt improvements on the private land in question. To date, we have been able to encourage limited works to the boundary of the site and have seen small areas of fly tipping removed but it is clear the landowner in question is not being cooperative and is only prepared to complete a minimum of maintenance pending development of the area.

This matter continues to receive attention and as soon as we have any further progress to report we will be pleased to update Ward Councillors accordingly.”

7. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Does the council have powers to mandate planning requirements and mandate items to be considered by officers and planning committee when making decisions?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“Planning applications which are submitted to the Council need to comply with local and national validation requirements which sets out what plans and information needs to be provided. If an application is deficient with any of the requirements, the local planning authority can require the information to be submitted unless the applicant can explain why it is not necessary. The Council needs to take a proportionate approach to validation and not seek to request information which is not necessary. The local planning authority, when determining applications, regardless of whether decisions are made under delegated authority or by the Planning Committee, need to have regard to the policies contained within the Development Plan, national policies and guidance and other material considerations.”

8. Question from Councillor M Ali

“What will be the process for appointing new independent directors for Woking Borough Council-related companies?”

9. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Who will manage this process?”

10. Question from Councillor M Ali

“Where and when will these vacancies be advertised?”

Reply to Questions 8, 9 &10 from Councillor A Azad

“The process for appointing new independent directors will be through open recruitment with final determination of appointments by Council.

Thameswey has been consulted on the range of skills it would find helpful to add to the Boards and a report will be submitted to the Executive at its meeting on 14 January 2021 setting out the number of Directors sought, the range of skills and the qualifying conditions for appointment.

The process will include a review of the long list of applications and interviews by the Leaders Group or their nominees with final recommendations being submitted to Council at its meeting on 8 April 2021.

Appointments will take effect in the new Municipal Year.

The process will be managed by the Chief Executive, with support from Legal and Human Resource colleagues.

It is proposed to advertise the vacancies through local media and through web sites specialising in Non-Executive Director roles.”

11. Question from Councillor G G Chrystie

“What changes in procedure /practice will the Borough have to adopt to comply with the new Public Works Loan Board guidelines?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) guidance published on 26 November 2020 set out the arrangements for future access to borrowing from the PWLB following the consultation earlier this year. The changes intend to stop local authorities acquiring investment assets primarily for yield. The changes will require the Council to submit a high-level description of capital spending and financing plans over a 3 year period. Expenditure will be categorised as Service Expenditure, Housing, Regeneration, Preventative Action, Treasury Management or Investment assets bought primarily for yield. A short description of the main projects in each of these categories will be required. The Finance Director, as section 151 officer, will need to provide assurance that the Council is not borrowing in advance of need and does not intend to buy investment assets primarily for yield.

When applying for a new loan the Council will be required to confirm that the plans remain current and that the assurance regarding investment assets remains valid.

The Council’s Property Investments have all been in the Borough and have had a strategic purpose such as facilitating regeneration, improvement of the asset or surrounding infrastructure or the protection of employment space.

In future it will be necessary to carefully consider any proposals to acquire assets to ensure that the PWLB guidance is met and that the assets do not meet the definition of ‘investment assets primarily for yield’.”

12. Question from Councillor G G Chrystie

“Progress upon major rebuilding the Victoria Arch seems slow. What is the timescale now for work commencing?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“I do not agree with the suggestion that progress on this major infrastructure project is slow, and it remains on its original project completion date of March 2024. The following key milestones have been reached.

Council approved the HIF Bid in February 2020.

The contract with Homes England was signed in March 2020.

Network Rail has determined the preferred bridge option in GRIP Stage 3 under its formal project development process.

Council approved the making of the Compulsory Purchase Order in July 2020.

Demolition on the Triangle site commenced in September 2020.”

13. Question from Councillor G G Chrystie

“Other Local Authorities have set up successful Park & Ride Facilities to ensure easy access to retail outlets especially in key commercial areas where there is a paucity or overloading of car parking space. Retailers are anxious to ensure that when lockdown eases, customers can readily visit their stores. Woking Community Transport is a huge asset to the Borough and can they be financed to assist shoppers visit shops?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“The Council does not have a problem with a lack of car parking space at the present time. I share your view of the excellent service provided by Woking Community Transport and it should be noted that the Council already assists Woking Community Transport. Investment is currently underway in our car parks to transform the customer experience and allow retailers to directly access parking promotions to encourage greater footfall. The new arrangements are due to be rolled out during the course of next year starting with Victoria Way car park.”

14. Question from Councillor G G Chrystie

“Health & Well Being Groups in the Borough are vital and co-ordination between partners in the field is understood to be developing fast: most encouraging! Can more publicity be provided to residents and resident organisations illustrating facilities available?”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“As a Council we are committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our residents. Where colleagues develop and deliver specific Council-led initiatives, services are always launched with a press release that is sent to members of the local press and interested local groups such as resident associations amongst others, a service webpage is created and social media posted raising awareness of the services scheduled. Where appropriate, printed materials are produced, such as posters and leaflets, that we circulate to, for example, GPs surgeries and local libraries, and other important touch points. In September, Members were invited to a briefing regarding health and wellbeing and are continually encouraged to engage with new local developments through the Health and Wellbeing Task Group.

In addition to promoting our own services, we have a proven track record of supporting our key partner health and wellbeing schemes through our residents’ magazine. In the past year we have featured prominently articles covering our green spaces, good neighbour schemes, local NHS and mental health services, and motivational singing groups to name but a few.

There is always more that can be done to promote Council-led and partner services to our residents. Organisations that are working with the Council to deliver services should contact the Marketing Communications team for advice on how best they can raise awareness of their services to residents.”

15. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“Please can we have an update on actions taken since Council unanimously agreed my motion on control of fireworks in July.”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“Due to the cancellation of all fireworks events on Council land, and the major focus on Covid activity, it has not yet been possible to progress the work in the timescale envisaged. As soon as Covid workloads permit, we will follow up all the actions as agreed.”

16. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“Goldsworth Park Recreation Ground playground was at the beginning of the last wave of playground updates. It is now ready for at least a refresh. When can we expect this to happen?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“There are no proposals for significant works to the playground at Goldsworth Park Recreation Ground within any future works programmes. However, in accordance with our normal routine, Serco will take the opportunity in the Spring to repaint equipment where appropriate to provide a refresh for the new year.”

Date Published:

2 December 2020

REPORT ENDS

Table providing information in response to Questions 3 and 4

	App Ref	Site	App Type	Dec Date	Decision	Case Officer	No. Units	Affordable Provision	Notes incl. any External Consultant's Input
1	PLAN/2011/1006	Dunmow House, 20 Rectory Lane, Byfleet, West Byfleet, Surrey,	FULL	08-Aug-12	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Josephine Moore	16	16	100% provision secured to offset the policy conflict with the nett loss of residential units.
2	PLAN/2012/0063	Former St Dunstons Church, White Rose Lane, Woking, Surrey, GU22 7AG,	OUTL	29-Jun-12	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	James Hutchison	Up to 91	£879,870	KCC appraisal agreed this as the greatest sum that could be viably contributed. <i>**Application superseded by PLAN/2016/1064</i>
3	PLAN/2012/0224	Land at Brookwood Farm, Bagshot Road, Woking, Surrey, GU21 2RP,	FULL	29-Apr-13	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Dan Freeland	297	£6,014.307 and 75 units on site	50% provision (25% on-site and 25% off-site contribution).
4	PLAN/2012/1103	112 -126 Connaught Road, Brookwood, Woking, Surrey, GU24 0AR	FULL	20-Dec-13	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Phillip Taylor	29	0	Records indicate the submissions showing unviability were agreed based on advice of WBC Housing Service and WBC Scientific Officer given the exceptional de-contamination costs of the site. External consultants not instructed.

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5	PLAN/ 2013/0081	Land at Balfour Avenue, Westfield Way, Newlands Avenue And Quartermaine Avenue , Westfield, Woking, Surrey, ,	FULL	10-Jun-13	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Robert Steele	371	224	60% provision (all socially-rented).
6	PLAN/ 2014/0014	Land At Victoria Way, Cawsey Way And Church Street West , Woking, Surrey,	FULL	26-Mar-15	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Jeni Jackson	392	0	KCC appraisal concluded scheme not viable without subsidy and cannot sustain Affordable Housing. WBC made a financial contribution of £18m in advance of the development to subsidise the provision of affordable homes by Thamesway Housing Limited so as to meet the policy requirement at that time.
7	PLAN/ 2014/0015	Land at Goldsworth Road and Butts Road, Butts Road, Woking,	REG4	08-May-14	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Robert Steele	27	27	100% Provision (all affordably-rented).
8	PLAN/ 2015/0989	73 Horsell Moor, Horsell, Woking, Surrey, GU21 4NL	FULL	30-Mar-16	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Joanne Hollingdale	34	£571,197	Applicant's appraisal argued no provision viable. KCC appraisal concluded that £571,197 could be sustained. Review clause recommended. Secured.
9	PLAN/ 2015/1260	Sheerwater Estate, Albert Drive, Sheerwater, Woking, Surrey	FULL	27-Jul-16	Permitted	Joanne Hollingdale	984	462	47% provision. Nett increase in number of affordable units on site 13 units. (Note: figs also include C2 accommodation). <i>**Application superseded by PLAN/2018/0337</i>

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10	PLAN/ 2016/0412	Parrington Autos, Workshop Rear of 12 Portugal Road, Woking, Surrey, GU21 5JE,	FULL	01-Mar-19	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	18	£271,565	Applicant's appraisal argued no provision viable. KCC appraisal concluded that 3 on-site units and £4,814 or £271,565 could be sustained. Review clause recommended. Secured.
11	PLAN/ 2016/0834	7 York Road, Woking, Surrey,	FULL	14-Jul-20	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	46	0	KCC disagreed with applicant's appraisal basis but agreed scheme unviable subject to review clauses.
12	PLAN/ 2016/1003	Broadoaks, Parvis Road, West Byfleet, Surrey, KT14 7AA	FULL	16-Oct-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Carol Ann O'Kane	151	36	29% provision. Based on KCC advice on viability, proportion was increased from 32 units.
13	PLAN/ 2016/1064	St Dunstons Church, White Rose Lane, Woking, Surrey, GU22 7AG,	FULL	31-May-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	107	8	7.5% provision. Applicant's appraisal argued no provision viable. KCC appraisal concluded that contribution of 8 units or £879,870 viable. 8 on-site units secured.
14	PLAN/ 2016/1192	Colbourne Garages, 74 - 76 Maybury Road, Woking, Surrey, GU21 5JD,	FULL	11-Jul-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Joanne Hollingdale	32	0	KCC disagreed with applicant's appraisal basis but agreed scheme was unviable albeit only marginally - so required review clauses.

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15	PLAN/2016/1204	Britannia Wharf, Monument Road, Woking, Surrey, ,	FULL	15-May-19	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Joanne Hollingdale	52	£242,528	Applicant's appraisal argued no provision viable. KCC appraisal concluded that 3 on-site units and £33,110 or £242,528 could be sustained. Review clause recommended. Secured.
16	PLAN/2017/0128	Land to The North of Old Woking Road and East of Station Approach, West Byfleet, Woking, Surrey, KT14 6NG	OUTL	21-Dec-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Benjamin Bailey	Up to 255	0	KCC appraisal consistent with applicant's subject to review clauses.
17	PLAN/2017/0153	Ian Allan Motors, 63 - 65 High Street, Old Woking, Woking, Surrey, GU22 9LN,	OUTL	20-Dec-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Benjamin Bailey	24	0	KCC appraisal consistent with applicant's. <i>**Application superseded by PLAN/2020/0304</i>
18	PLAN/2017/0644	St Dunstons Church, White Rose Lane, Woking, Surrey, GU22 7AG,	FULL	22-Dec-17	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	147	11	7.5% provision. Applicant's appraisal argued no provision was viable. KCC concluded should be capable of provision of 11 units which was secured.
19	PLAN/2017/0802	46 Chertsey Road, Woking, Surrey,	FULL	11-Apr-18	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	68	0	KCC appraisal concluded deficit £1.9m less than applicant's appraisal but still unviable. Should be subject to review clause.

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	App Ref	Site	App Type	Dec Date	Decision	Case Officer	No. Units	Affordable Provision	Notes incl. any External Consultant's Input
20	PLAN/ 2018/0337	Sheerwater Estate, Albert Drive, Sheerwater, Woking, Surrey	REG3	18-Apr-19	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Joanne Hollingdale	1003	499	46% provision. Nett increase in number of affordable units on site 51 units. (Note: figs also include C2 accommodation).
21	PLAN/ 2018/0359	Broadoaks, Parvis Road, West Byfleet, Surrey, KT14 7AA	FULL	06-Feb-19	Permitted	Tanveer Rahman	179	54	30.1% provision (tenure split & mix compliant) KCC appraisal consistent with applicant's subject to review clause.
22	PLAN/ 2019/0904	12-16, 25-31 Portugal Road and Lok N Store Marlborough Road, Woking, Surrey, GU21 5JE,	FULL	07-Apr-20	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	David Raper	72	29	40.3% provision (21 affordable rent 8 shared ownership).
23	PLAN/ 2020/0304	Former Ian Allan Motors, 63 - 65 High Street And, Copthorne, Priors Croft, Old Woking, Woking, Surrey, GU22 9LN	REG3	10-Jun-20	Permitted subject to s106 Agreement	Benjamin Bailey	48	48	100% provision (all socially-rented).