

**QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 8 APRIL 2021**

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

This question will be dealt with under Part II of the agenda.

2. Question from Councillor M Ali

“At the Council meeting on 25 July 2019, Cllr Cundy stated that “There has been no net loss of public green/open space other than land which had been safeguarded historically to meet future development needs. The Sheerwater Regeneration Project will provide a net gain in public open space. Improved public access to open space has been delivered through the creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and at the Sportsbox.” How much is the “land which had been safeguarded historically to meet future development needs” and where is it located?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“Councillor Cundy at the time was referring to the sites within the Green Belt that are allocated and safeguarded in the draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) to meet future development needs. The sites are:

- Site GB1 – land south of Brookwood Lye Road, Brookwood. The site is 2.65 hectares (ha);
- Site GB 2 – land at Five Acres, Brookwood Lye Road, Brookwood. The site is 0.61 ha;
- Site GB4 – land south of Parvis Road and High Road, Byfleet. Land is 5.83 ha and is safeguarded to meet future development needs beyond this current Core Strategy period;
- Site GB5 – land to the south of Rectory Lane, Byfleet. Land is 4.40 ha and is safeguarded to meet future development needs beyond the current Core Strategy period;
- Six Crossroads roundabout – 1.14 ha;
- Site GB7 – Nursery land adjacent to Egley Road, Mayford. Land is 18.65 ha;
- Site GB8 – Woking Garden Centre, Egley Road, Mayford. Land is 1.62 ha;
- Sites GB9 and GB9A – land surrounding West Hall, West Byfleet. Land is 29.33 ha;
- Site GB10 – Broadoaks, Parvis Road, West Byfleet. Land is 14.7 ha; and
- Site GB11 – West Byfleet Junior and infant School Playing Fields, Parvis Road, West Byfleet. Land is 6.78 ha and is allocated as open space to serve the school.

Members will know that other than the above sites, the only significant greenfield sites that have come forward for development are Land at Moor Lane and Land at Brookwood Farm. Members should note that Moor Lane and Brookwood Farm were not within the Green Belt.”

3. Question from Councillor M Ali

“How does the council's Debt Recovery Strategy compare with the Citizens' Advice Bureau guidelines?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“In March the Council adopted the Citizens Advice/Local Government Association Council Tax Protocol. The report to the Executive included an assessment of the Council's Debt Recovery Strategy against these guidelines. The Council's recovery procedures are consistent with the Protocol and more up to date where regulations have changed since 2017.”

4. Question from Councillor C Rana

“Will the Portfolio Holder for Housing agree to bring forward a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan to the Council during 2021?”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“I'm pleased to say that the Council already has a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, covering the period 2020 to 2024. This was adopted by Full Council in February 2020 as part of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The adopted strategy specifically states *“The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan is intended to be a live document, which will be subject to continuous review and updating to ensure it remains effective and current. Updates will be published on the Council's website.”*

In light of the unprecedented response to homelessness during the pandemic, where we have helped over 160 individuals, I would be very happy for the action plan to be refreshed and updated and to bring an update to the Housing Task Group.”

5. Question from Councillor C Rana

“Can the Portfolio Holder outline what is being done to provide youth facilities in order to help young people deal with the impact of lockdown?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“During lockdown there has been much support for young people particularly in the form of outreach. The Council's Youth Development Officer and team have had regular contact with young people who attend groups targeted at young carers, special educational needs and disability, young women, LGBT+, one to one support in schools and detached outreach on Kingsmoor Park and West Byfleet. Sessions have been conducted in small groups at various Centres across the Borough, in accordance with National Youth Agency (NYA) guidelines, also via online platforms. Young people and their families have also been referred for wider support from the Foodbank, Surrey Care Trust mentoring, bereavement support, youth counselling services and outdoor exercise.

Creative activities overseen by the Council's Arts Development Officer have been developed including art projects (Art for Ambition and the Puppet Project) focussing on emotional well-being. There have also been gardening activities including families nurturing seeds ready for planting in our new outdoor cafes in the Centres for the Community, in partnership with RHS Wisley.

Moving forward, discussions with Surrey County Council are continuing, as new providers get ready to sign the leases for youth centres in Sheerwater and Knaphill. We are in close conversations with both of these providers and supporting them and looking to maximise these opportunities. We are also speaking to the Knaphill provider to broaden the reach to include Goldsworth Park. The outcome will be that there will be far more use of the centres for open-access youth activity. We are also applying to Active Surrey for funding to run 'holiday hunger' schemes in the Summer holidays. This will be in partnership with Food Wise and Freedom Leisure to combine healthy, fun activities with healthy, quality food and education. Wider activities such as the Friday Night project at the leisure centre will continue when safe to do so.

Regarding employment support, the Council in December 2020 was successful in a funding application to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver additional employment support for 18-25 year olds who are in receipt of Universal Credit. Following a tender exercise, the Council has awarded local charity Surrey Care Trust the contract to provide this support. Surrey Care Trust will launch this work with DWP Work Coaches, based from the Centres for the Community, across the Borough starting later this month. This is a great new initiative to support young adults into apprenticeships, training and employment and to work alongside the wider family and employment support services that we have in the Borough."

6. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

"Did the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development see the recent news about Woking's performance in the Vitality Index?"

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

"Yes I did indeed. And isn't it fantastic news! Woking was ranked UK's best performing location across a range of measures, spanning the economy, health outcomes and the local environment. The Index assesses the UK's 100 largest towns and cities outside London to identify which locations are the best to live and do business in, and have the strongest growth prospects.

Woking performed "especially well" for the Economy and Business and Health and Environment measures and had a top score for wage growth and commercial property investment. Woking was also particularly strong on the Health and Environment pillar, with low levels of cardiovascular mortality and high scores for life satisfaction and recycling. It also scored highly for educational attainment, affluent households and a low retail vacancy rate.

Through a shared vision, big ambition and focused investment, our exciting transformation is helping to ensure we reach our full potential by creating new opportunities for economic growth and job creation in an enviable location which puts health, quality of life and our environment at its heart.

I am delighted that our progress and success in delivering on plans put in place more than a decade ago continue to deliver our vision to ensure that Woking will be the region's leading economic hub, drive prosperity and growth and attract investment. We remain committed to leading the way to make sure Woking continues to be a great place for people to live, work, visit, socialise and invest."

7. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

"Our Iconic War Memorial in Jubilee Square only displays the names of the World War One dead. Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that the Council should prioritise extension of the memorial to include the names of the dead of World War Two?"

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Yes. Consideration has been given to adding additional panels to the existing memorial and/or place panels elsewhere in Jubilee Square. I will add this idea to our Big Conversation and if the public support it, as I hope they will, we will commission design options when resources permit.”

8. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

“Should the Council impose a height limit on buildings in Woking Town Centre?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“The Executive considered a paper on this subject at its last meeting and we have this same paper to discuss later in the agenda. This administration has given a commitment to have a meaningful and ongoing conversation with residents about all town centre development issues and I am not going to pre-empt anything. However, I will say that if Members are minded to set a height limit in the future, it should be well informed by evidence and be done through due planning process.”

9. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

“When allocating CIL awards to Wards should there be an in built flexibility / discretion? Inevitably there are delays in the request and monies being awarded and work being carried out leading to costs rising particularly in current times.”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“There is already flexibility built into the current arrangement for securing CIL money for local community projects to cater for marginal cost overruns. The Director of Planning (previously the Deputy Chief Executive) has delegated authority to approve marginal cost overruns without the need to take a report to the Joint Committee.”

10. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

“Over the plan period so far the target for homes is 3212 with 2744 delivered there is an under provision to date of 468. Would the Portfolio Holder like to comment?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“It is disappointing that there is a significant under provision of homes to date against the total housing requirement. It is highly likely that this under provision has to a significant extent been exacerbated in the last two years by low economic activity during the pandemic period. The housing requirement should be seen as an average over time, and the trajectory for 2021/22 could be positive with the completion of Victoria Square, which comprises of about 429 new homes. It is also important for the Planning Committee to be mindful of the contribution of planning approvals on a range of sites, in particular, within the Town Centre in improving the prospect of achieving the housing requirement. This cannot be emphasised enough. Officers will continue to monitor the situation, and it is important that the Council doubles its efforts to create the necessary environment to attract investment into the Borough when the nation comes out of the pandemic.”

11. Question from Councillor N Martin

“How many affordable homes have been undelivered as a result of applications turned down by the planning committee since May 2019?”

Reply from Councillor G W Elson

“Since May 2019, the Planning Committee has refused applications which would have provided a total of 552 units of affordable housing as well as £1,824,500 as commuted sums which would have been paid in lieu of providing affordable housing on the application site. The commuted sum would have been used to provide affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough and could have subsidised around 15-20 additional social rented homes (or considerably more at affordable rents and/or if match funded with other grants).”

12. Question from Councillor N Martin

“In her Woking Magazine article, the Leader of the Council spoke about new policy on Animal Welfare. Is it still her plan to introduce this?”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Animal Welfare is an issue that the Executive takes very seriously and the subject is on the Executive Forward Plan.”

13. Question from Councillor N Martin

“With the issue of violence against women sadly featuring in the news, can the Portfolio Holder explain what action the Council is taking to tackle this issue?”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The tragic Sarah Everard case has heightened awareness of the wider issues around Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The Council works closely with other agencies, such as Surrey Police and Your Sanctuary, as part of the Safer Woking Partnership to tackle these issues, including domestic abuse (DA).

There are a number of initiatives ongoing at the moment to promote and increase safety across the Borough. This includes work with Surrey Police on “Canal Watch”, a community initiative to tackle a number of indecent exposures on the Basingstoke Canal. This has featured in the local Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings and partnership discussions focussing on long term problem solving. Crime Prevention advice and guidance across the Borough has been specifically data led to encourage reporting and highlighting supportive agencies in Woking. Surrey Police has also increased the capability of their teams in Woking, to ensure that staff are trained on pieces of legislation such as ‘Clare’s Law’ which will directly support people at risk of domestic abuse, allow informed decision making and protect people from harm.

Whilst ensuring that public spaces are safe for women and everybody else, the key to reducing Violence Against Women and Girls and domestic abuse is definitely around education. Your Sanctuary is working on a strategy to support young people who are experiencing domestic abuse and part of that will also be around education/prevention work. They are also working with a corporate partner to look at how technology and digital platforms can help them to engage with more young people – again with the aim of supporting survivors but also raising awareness. During this last year with the pandemic, the Council has made good use of social media, with some of our highest responses being around the posts on domestic abuse. The Council regularly supports awareness raising campaigns, works closely with appropriate partner agencies and will continue to do so.”

14. Question from Councillor N Martin

“Would the Portfolio Holder comment on the number of trees being planted by the Council as part of its commitment to climate change?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“The Council’s annual tree planting programme has seen over 335 trees planted this year in 200 residential and urban locations across the Borough.

The Council’s own climate emergency action plan prioritises those actions which will enable the organisation to best deliver towards carbon neutrality by 2030. Planet Woking is the place to go for residents wishing to learn how they can help reduce their carbon footprint see <https://planetwoking.co.uk/>.”

15. Question from Councillor S Hussain

“When will the Residents panel meet to discuss the New Masterplan for the Town Centre?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“Engagement on the Masterplan for the Town Centre will begin in earnest after the elections with focus groups meeting in June. It is important that the operation of the Residents’ Panel be given a short test first in order to ensure that things runs smoothly for this, the first substantial utilisation of the Panel to input into council policy and plan-making.

I hope that this will form a Woking Town Centre Masterplan that will have proper weight and consequence when planning decisions are being made.”

16. Question from Councillor G S Cundy

“With the reported increase in domestic violence nationally, does the Leader agree that the support of the Council for Your Sanctuary has been invaluable?”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“Your Sanctuary is our local specialist support service for survivors of domestic abuse, as well as their concerned family and friends, and a source of advice for local professionals. The Council has supported Your Sanctuary for many years, with funding and rent free premises, as well as working closely together on many awareness raising campaigns. Locally, as well as nationally, the pandemic has made it more challenging for those experiencing domestic abuse and we have seen more seek help, particularly as we come out of lockdown.

The crime of Domestic Violence is a high volume crime for Surrey Police and is one of their key priorities. In Woking it has increased by 7% in the last financial year, as a result of the pandemic and may increase further in 2022. Your Sanctuary provides a support network that policing is unable to provide in the long term.

- The Council provides an annual grant towards the costs of the community outreach service to support survivors of domestic abuse that are living or working in the borough. Survivors are supported both emotionally and practically via 1:1s and group work. The service aims to increase safety of survivors and to enable them to understand the abuse they are experiencing and therefore to take decisions around their own safety and wellbeing. This grant also contributes towards the provision of the Your Sanctuary Helpline and chat service which gives information, support and signposting to survivors, concerned family and friends and professionals.
- Your Sanctuary occupy a number of offices at very low or no rent which provides space for the outreach and helpline teams, for the administration and management teams and for client meetings. This office space is in a very discreet location which they feel is vital for the safety of staff, volunteers and survivors.

- The Council has recently leased a purpose built refuge to Your Sanctuary that has 25 bedrooms and is able to accommodate a number of families and single women who are fleeing domestic abuse. Due to the financial arrangements they will be able to accommodate a number of women with no recourse to public funds. They will also continue to support women with complex needs in this refuge. This has greatly expanded the number of women and families that they will be able to support.

Domestic abuse is still a key crime priority for the Safer Woking Partnership, as it has been for many years, due to the volume and impact that it has locally and nationally. Your Sanctuary helps and supports us to tackle this as part of our partnership work. The Council work very closely with Your Sanctuary and both organisations are very engaged and proactive in county wide domestic abuse strategic initiatives and awareness raising.”

17. Question from Councillor R Mohammed

“Does the Leader of the Council share my delight that the residents panel is now up and running?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“I am delighted that the Residents’ Panel is up and running. We now have approximately 700 residents signed up to the Panel to date and we have already begun the Big Conversation with residents by asking some questions that will inform and shape our programme of events and engagement after the elections.

Our initial satisfaction survey and Panel recruitment questionnaire has been delivered directly to 10,000 residents, randomly selected from a list of every address in the Borough and proportionately representative of the population split in each Ward, as per the Electoral Register.

The response from our residents has been fantastic – from the surveys that have been completed, we are already listening to residents and gaining honest and critical feedback from people on how they see the Council. I’m sure that all Members are looking forward to the further opportunities the Residents’ Panel will bring in allowing all residents to help shape the future of our Borough.”

18. Question from Councillor J R Sanderson

“Please can you provide the latest information for the year 2020/21 from New Vision Homes in respect of the responsive repairs service including the volume of items that have been reported and dealt with, data on the average time taken to process and a breakdown of the type of repairs required. Please provide similar data for the previous year 2019/20 to the extent available.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The responsive element of the contract is broadly split into two main components; day to day general repairs carried out by Breyer and gas responsive repairs carried out by TSG. As Breyer took over the general responsive repairs in October 2019, the figures below cover the year 2020/21 and the year October 2019 – September 2020.

Over the past 12 months (April 2020 – March 2021), Breyer carried out 7,866 responsive repairs (compared to 9,487 during October 2019 to September 2020). Over the same period, TSG carried out a total of 2,643 responsive gas repairs (compared to 3,453 during October 2019 to September 2020). These figures include installations, but exclude 2,475 servicing jobs.

In total, New Vision Homes (NVH) has carried out 10,509 responsive repairs (down from 12,940 during October 2019 to September 2020). This is entirely a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is remarkable that both Breyer and TSG completed as much as they

did during an extremely challenging 12 months, especially when many councils and housing associations have scaled back their repairs services to essential works only.

On average, Breyer took 14.38 days to complete a repair job (please bear in mind this is across all repairs categories, so includes Emergency within 24 hours, Urgent within 3 working days and Routine within 28 working days). On average, TSG took 3.49 days to complete gas responsive repairs jobs. The combined average for a responsive repair was 11.57 days.

Below is a breakdown of the number of Breyer responsive repair jobs carried out by trade in 2020/21. Together with the TSG gas repairs/breakdowns, it gives a clearer picture of the volume and type of works undertaken to achieve the 10,509 total figure of repairs.

As a similar question was raised at Council in October 2020, I will request that regular updates to these figures are provided to the Housing Task Group, so that the data can be compiled in a timely manner and scrutinised by the Group.

Activity	Number of Jobs
NVH-Aids & Adaptations	161
NVH-Asphalt	1
NVH-Bricklaying	53
NVH-Carpentry	1459
NVH-Clearance	15
NVH-Drainage	331
NVH-Electrical	1553
NVH-Fencing	242
NVH-Groundworks	27
NVH-Heating	4
NVH-Painting	50
NVH-Plastering	69
NVH-Plumbing	2942
NVH-ROOFING	417
NVH-Specialist	123
NVH-Tiling	114
NVH-WINDOWS	247
NVH-WINDOWS AND DOORS	58
<b>Total Breyer repairs</b>	<b>7866</b>
 TSG gas/boiler Breakdowns	 2643
<b>Total TSG repairs</b>	<b>2643</b>
 NVH Responsive repairs	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>10509</b>



19. Question from Councillor R N Leach

“At the last council meeting, in answer to my question, the portfolio holder reassured me that legal steps would be taken to get the landowner of the waste ground in De Lara Way to clear it up for the benefit of residents. What legal measures have now been taken?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“The Council’s Legal Services team have written formally to the landowner since the last Council meeting. The Landowner is now in contact with the Council and has confirmed that arrangements are in place for the land to be cleared and hoarding placed around the site. The Landowner has confirmed that a contractor has been appointed to undertake the works on the landowners behalf which are anticipated to start in early June. The Council will continue to monitor the site and take steps to serve a notice under s215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 if the landowner does not bring the land back to a reasonable standard.”

20. Question from Councillor G G Chrystie

“Borough Responsibility for Re Housing Displaced Tenants

I have just been informed that the Borough seems to be agreeing to re-house tenants who will be displaced due to a potential commercial development. The development does not involve the Borough as an entity and there seems no obligation to re House. The party selling the land to facilitate development is apparently due to receive a large sum of money from the developer.

As a matter of procedure please confirm that the Borough will only take on liability for such a rehousing provided the landowner fully compensates the Borough for all relocation costs and expenses plus any other liability arising?

Why should the Borough step into a situation where the re housing is solely the responsibility of the landowner and liability is incalculable?

Where the Borough has an interest in the land sale clearly a different line of action applies.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The Council was approached by a housing association, Hyde Housing, who have 10 affordable properties that may be subject to re-development. The housing association do not own any other housing stock in the Borough and were seeking help from the Council to find alternative accommodation for their affected tenants. The liability for moving costs - such as home loss payments and removals – would be borne by the housing association. The housing association has offered the Council subsidy towards replacement affordable homes, so that this would be cost neutral to the Council. The Council feels this approach would ensure the affected tenants are appropriately re-housed in the local area and with a social landlord who is fully committed to the Borough.”

21. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“How many outstanding items, agreed by Executive or Council in the last 3 years, still have part 2, confidential status.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Nine.”

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REPORT ENDS