

(6) **MEMBER QUESTIONS**

Questions have been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

(1) **From Councillor AR Brassington to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Environment**

'A number of new street signs have been installed in Cirencester and across the Cotswolds.

The frames they sit in are made of a galvanised steel and no effort has been made to paint them in order to make them sensitive to our conservation areas or the AONB. Surely this isn't befitting of the beautiful Cotswolds?

Will the Cabinet Member commit to ensuring that all new frames for street signs are painted?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

I am happy to look at the cost of having the frames painted for all new signs that are installed. If this results in any significant budgetary impacts, a report will be brought back to Members for decision.

(2) **From Councillor AR Brassington to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Environment**

'At present, planning notices are displayed in plastic wallets, which are usually fixed to lamp post columns or poles with sellotape.

Does the Cabinet Member agree that this is an awful example of where this Council is using single use plastics, and will she look into re-usable notice boards that can be affixed to surfaces that many other Councils use?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

I would be happy to explore this but, as with the previous question, the cost implications will need to be considered; and there may be some practicality issues in certain locations, in terms of how re-usable notice boards would be fixed.

(3) **From Councillor Jenny Forde to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Environment**

'What has been the increase in fly tipping in my ward since Fosse Cross had its opening hours changed?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

We are monitoring the impact of GCC's decision to reduce the HWRC opening hours from 28th October. November saw an increase of 14 from the previous year (52 reported in 2017 to 66 reported in 2018) - this is not a

significant increase and fly tip numbers fluctuate anyway. However, we will continue to monitor to see if a pattern of increased fly tipping emerges over time.

(4) From Councillor PCB Coleman to Councillor Nick Parsons, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'In May, I asked a question about the costs relating to the Berrells Road application judicial review challenge and the value of the S106 benefits withdrawn as a result of the judicial review.'

The Deputy Leader told me that he would provide me with a written response to this question which, to date, I still haven't received. Why have I still not had an answer?'

Response from Councillor Nick Parsons

I am aware that this matter was further addressed at the last Council Meeting, but had not appreciated that a written response had not followed - for which I apologise.

For the benefit of all, I can confirm as follows:-

- *the planning obligations offered as part of the original application relating to the Berrells Road site were also agreed and included within the permission granted as a result of the appeal decision;*
- *the planning obligations offered relating to the Highfield Farm site were subject to change across the original application, the permission granted as a result of the appeal decision, and a revised scheme for the site submitted after the appeal outcome and approved by the Council - by way of example, the original application provided for 20% affordable housing and a contribution of £600,000 towards indoor community resources; the appeal decision increased affordable housing provision to 50%, but omitted the contribution towards indoor facilities; whereas the revised scheme provided for no less than 21% affordable housing (as a result of a viability assessment), a significant contribution towards the provision/upgrading of community facilities, and other benefits that had been common to the previous application and appeal decision;*
- *the appeal decisions (and the subsequent CDC decision re Highfield Farm) had regard to the requirements of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations.*

I have asked Officers to provide a composite response to you, and for public record purposes, which covers your original and supplementary questions and associated points you have raised.

(5) From Councillor Jenny Forde to Councillor AW Berry, Leader Elect of the Council

'What is being done by the Council to encourage more women, young people and under-represented groups to stand for Council next year, to ensure that our Council reflects its residents?'

Response from Councillor Berry

I believe it is important that the Council is not seen to be seeking to influence the democratic election process. As such, while I consider it vital that we make it easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with those rules, I do not believe that, as a Council, we should seek to influence the profile of candidates.

I know that, in the new year, the Returning Officer intends to make available a wide range of information, via different channels, and also to hold events for prospective councillors. It should also be remembered that political parties probably provide the largest proportion of candidates, so they too have a role.

In an ideal world, local communities would be represented by a diverse pool of councillors - quality individuals who are capable, vibrant, energetic and engaged, and with a commitment to local people. However, it is not a requirement for the Council to secure a mix of councillors, but it is imperative that councillors, once elected, seek to represent the interests of all.

(6) From Councillor NP Robbins to Councillor AW Berry, Leader Elect of the Council

'In 2014, the Planning Committee at CDC unanimously voted to support plans to regenerate Cirencester's Market Place, the Conservative Cabinet also voted to support the scheme with £100,000 and Conservative-controlled Gloucestershire County Council raised no objections.

Does this administration support the new Market Place scheme?'

Response from Councillor Berry

Yes, the Council does support the Market Place Scheme, where a much better designed and larger public space has been delivered as an overall enhanced offer for the Town; and is delighted that the scheme has been recognised by winning a national design award.

A recently-agreed Memorandum of Understanding commits both District and Town Councils to work together on future plans for the town centre, with the aim of securing a solution that is conducive to a healthy and vibrant economy. This approach will help unlock investment and deliver co-ordinated improvements across the town centre which will also include a number of outstanding issues of public interest and/or concern, including:

- *creating more Blue Badge parking spaces;*
- *improving facilities: seating, signage, greenery and a new phone box;*

- *creating clarity over traffic flows;*
- *ensuring that there are no continuing health and safety issues.*

We also support the Town Council's previously-stated intention to carry out a full public review of the scheme.

(7) From Councillor Mark Harris to Councillor AW Berry, Leader Elect of the Council

'At the 19th October 2017 meeting, I highlighted the PM's Conservative Party Conference speech that wanted to create "a new generation of council houses to help fix our broken housing market". The government was offering up £2Bn to achieve this, and I asked that a cross-party group be set up to ensure we establish eligibility to get our fair share.

The reply was that it needed looking into, that the formation of Publica might speed up the process, and then a cross-party working party could be set up.

A year later I have not heard any more.

At this year's Conservative Party Conference, Theresa May used her closing speech to announce that she is getting rid of the cap on what councils can borrow to build homes.

She said "Solving the housing crisis is the biggest domestic policy challenge of our generation. We cannot make the case for capitalism if ordinary working people have no chance of owning capital."

The LGA described the move as "fantastic".

All I want to do is ensure that the Cotswolds gets its share and we do not miss out - so please would the Leader tell me why the people of the Cotswolds who need affordable housing have been neglected for over a year while Publica gets up to speed?'

Response from Councillor Berry

To provide affordable homes for local people, of appropriate types and tenures, including starter homes and homes for life, is an objective for this Council as set out in our Corporate Strategy. I am keen to explore all available opportunities that might help us deliver on that priority.

I can also confirm that the Government's current Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme remains open for bids, that we are an eligible bidder (including in respect of social rented provision), and that Officers have been exploring the available opportunities and the detailed requirements.

I have been made aware of approaches being taken by some of our councils that we work in partnership with, including the potential establishment of a Housing Company in Forest of Dean and the financial support to a local housing association to build more affordable homes in West Oxfordshire. Our Officers are in on-going discussions with their counter-parts at Forest of Dean DC to see whether a housing company option here would be able to deliver any more affordable housing than would already come through via developers

- given the significant differences in site availability and land values across the two areas.

I am also aware that informal discussions have previously taken place with Cabinet Members on the implications/benefits/disadvantages of re-establishing a Housing Revenue Account, given that, by and large, the Council does not hold land assets which are available for housing development.

Moving forward, I have discussed the matter with the Publica MD who has suggested that we arrange a meeting with an independent expert from Local Partnerships (a consultancy company owned by the LGA) to help us understand our options on how best to deliver on our objectives. It is hoped that this meeting will take place early in the New Year and I am happy to invite representatives from the Liberal Democrat Group to attend. I would expect that following the advice of an independent expert will enable us to bring forward a report to the Cabinet to formally consider any options.

In addition, I am aware of one site that we do own (where the development potential is below the threshold by which we could insist on affordable housing provision) which might be used to secure affordable homes through an alternative method. I believe that the site presents a real opportunity not only to secure affordable housing to deliver on the 'social' value of the site but also to deliver an exemplar housing scheme which sets the standard for the rest of the area in terms of green infrastructure and planning a scheme to enhance health and well-being. I have held initial discussions with Officers and a report will be presented to the Cabinet in the coming months.

I would also like to take this opportunity to confirm that there has been no let-up in efforts to deliver affordable housing since the formation of Publica - in 2017/18 we enabled 247 affordable housing units against a target of a minimum of 150 units; and this year we have delivered 185 units so far, again against an annual target of 150 units, and anticipate that we will see a total of approx. 300 affordable units delivered in the District this financial year. We have delivered social rented units, affordable rent properties, and low cost home ownership such as shared ownership and discounted sale homes. These provide a range of opportunities for people within a number of income brackets, but priced out of the open market, to find appropriate housing to meet their need. In addition, affordable homes also become available for re-let as people move on. This includes social rented homes as, often, tenants in existing social rented homes move on to new affordable rent or shared ownership homes, freeing up social rented homes for others that need them.

(8) Councillor JA Harris to Councillor AW Berry, Leader Elect of the Council

'How many social rented houses have been built in the Cotswolds over the last year?'

Response from Councillor Berry

Thirty - but this is part of a much more extensive affordable housing provision (as described in my response to the previous question).

(9) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor Mark MacKenzie-Charrington, Cabinet Member for Planning and Licensing Services and Cirencester Car Parking Project

'At the last meeting, Councillor Roly Hughes asked you about tidying up Brewery Court, particularly the former Bramley's building, of which CDC is the freeholder.

You told us that works would commence at the end of September if Wildmoor, who is the leaseholder, had not made repairs.

It is now December and the area is still blighted. Why has nothing happened?'

Response from Councillor Mackenzie-Charrington

Officers have continued to work with Wildmoor, who carried out some initial repairs but failed to deliver the full extent of the works required by the Council. Given the potential for impending works on the site in respect of implementing the planning approvals, Officers felt it appropriate for Wildmoor to put forward alternative proposals which would meet the Council's desired outcome of an improved visual appearance in the area but would not force the company to undertake expensive works to buildings which would relatively shortly be subject to demolition upon commencement of the substantive works.

Wildmoor did put forward some proposals to tidy the site but have not yet completed these as they have been awaiting vinyl hoarding of a design similar to Farrell Close to be commissioned.

Officers felt it appropriate to give Wildmoor some more time to do this rather than risk taxpayers' money in completing works and then seeking compensation from the company.

We have reiterated the importance of the issue to the Council and residents of Cirencester, in order to reduce any blight in this area of town.

Works are now underway, and we expect the boards to be covered with appropriate vinyls as per Farrell Close. However, provided an acceptable scheme is achieved, we would not now expect Wildmoor to do everything in the initial repairs notice (such as replacing glazing) as it would seem pointless if the building is going to be demolished - however, further cosmetic works to tidy up the building are required.

Notes:

(i) The above questions were submitted by the time by responses are guaranteed to be provided to the questioner at least 24 hours before the Council Meeting (by virtue of the Council's Procedure Rules). As such, written responses will be provided to all Members either in advance of, or at, the Council Meeting.

(ii) If the questioners are present at the Meeting, they will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or their original question.

(iii) The Member to whom any supplementary question is addressed will try and answer any supplementary question at the Meeting; but if this is not possible, then the Member will answer as much as possible at the Meeting and then provide a full response within five working days. If, for any reason, a full response cannot be provided within those five days, then a holding response will be sent to the questioner, along with the reason for delay and a likely timescale for the full response.

(END)