



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 27 June 2007

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

"Will the Portfolio Holder please remind me and the Council what site is specifically designated in the latest Local Plan as the preferred location for the new South Park & Ride?"

Reply

"Policy W.4 of the Winchester District Local Plan Review (2006) is the principal policy dealing with Park and Ride proposals in Winchester. It states that planning permission will be granted for Park and Ride sites, subject to several criteria. It provides for Park and Ride sites to be developed in the countryside, outside the built-up area of Winchester, subject to a number of requirements and goes on to indicate that Park and Ride will be permitted at Bushfield Camp in association with recreation development planned for that site.

In relation to Bushfield Camp, Local Plan Policy W.3 allocates the site for open sports, informal recreation and small-scale tourism uses, although the policy itself does not require Park and Ride provision. The explanatory text accompanying Policy W.3 notes that Bushfield Camp offers the opportunity for the development of Park and Ride and that the Bushfield Camp Study concluded that such a facility could be developed in association with recreational uses.

The site at Bushfield Camp was one of a number considered as possible alternatives when the County Council carried out an assessment of the different possible Park and Ride sites to the South of Winchester and early on in that assessment process it became clear that the site would not be available for such development.

The Local Plan does not prevent other sites being developed for Park and Ride, provided they meet the requirements of Policy W.4 and other relevant policies of the Local Plan."



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“Was the Portfolio Holder aware that the consequence of Hampshire County Council's investment in the new Discovery Centre has always been their intention to close the Tower Arts Centre, and would she agree that the closure of the Tower Arts Centre or the transfer of the facility to school management would remove a much valued arts service to the community of Winchester and is an unnecessary and regrettable proposal which should be resisted by the City Council.”

Reply

“Winchester City Council greatly values the contribution made by the Tower to the life of the city. It provides cultural facilities which have not traditionally been available elsewhere in the city, and the local community has particularly benefited from its excellent work with those with disabilities (towards which we gave a capital grant) and with young people and children. It also has a loyal following locally for whom any suggestion of change will be difficult. We recently conferred ‘key client’ status on the Tower as part of our review of the organisations we fund, and our current arts strategy places some emphasis on the strategic importance of the venue.

However, there is no decision to close the Tower Arts Centre. The proposal, which was first put to the Portfolio Holder in writing by Hampshire County Council on 17th May this year, is to transfer the management of the centre to neighbouring Kings’ School. As it is not yet clear how the school will choose to use the centre, in terms of the balance of community and school activities, it is too early to be able to assess the impact on the services currently provided by the Tower. A meeting is therefore being arranged with Hampshire County Council’s arts service and the school before the summer holidays. Nor is it clear at this time what the balance will be at the Discovery Centre between programmed events and commercial hirings, although the limitations of the performance space have been noted.

New opportunities will indisputably be provided by the Discovery Centre and by the University of Winchester’s new Student Union venue. There is also potential for close working with Kings’ School on our delivery of services for children and young people. In view of this changing cultural landscape and the financial pressures on both County and City Councils, it is important to consider new ways of delivering services. Once more details emerge about the proposed transfer we will be better equipped to consider our own position, including our current contribution of £21,000 in core funding.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Can I be advised of the progress with arranging for some form of signage for the secondary retail locations off the High Street in Winchester?”

Reply

Recognising that signage alone is unlikely to ensure the long term wellbeing of the secondary retail areas of the city, a package of measures was detailed by the Leader in a letter to the Parchment Street traders in August 2006. The package included:

- introducing ‘speciality shopping’ pedestrian signs to key shopping streets off the main High Street (St Thomas’ St, Parchment St, The Square);
- devising and distributing a speciality shopping leaflet aimed at supporting trade in the autumn / Christmas build-up;
- supporting the introduction of a German-style Christmas market in the Cathedral Inner Close to generate more and new shoppers into the city;
- a new speciality shopping section on the redesigned visitwinchester website at www.visitwinchester.co.uk/site/things-to-do/shopping

All these measures were put in place within six months.

In addition, a pilot is underway to pedestrianise the hammerhead section of The Square to encourage more of a ‘café culture’ ambience and increase its attraction as a shopping quarter. This has been well received.

The new business enterprise centre at 10 Parchment Street will also generate more footfall once it opens this summer, with its own programme of marketing communications and its meeting room facilities.

Officers are currently working with retailers to commission an archway or other feature at the junction of Parchment and St George’s Streets to increase awareness and profile of Parchment Street. Following an earlier, unsuccessful round of proposals from Hampshire-based artists, submissions are now being invited from a wider field of artists based on a redrafted specification. A timescale is being established with traders at a meeting on 26th June.

Finally, there is year-round support for the speciality shopping areas of the city through the tourism marketing service, via print and PR campaigns. This would be enhanced, should the BID ballot prove positive, through BID-funded retail campaigns and other agreed initiatives to improve local trading conditions.



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

“What is the financial impact on the Council of the delays in filling Avalon House and moving out of the Historic Resource Centre?”

Reply

The marketing of Avalon House started before the property was vacated. Following the move of staff out of the property in May marketing efforts have been increased. Unfortunately despite interest from a number of parties no progress towards a letting has been made. The Council's preference has been for a tenant of the whole building, as a letting on a floor by floor basis would be less advantageous for the Council. The projected date for letting is likely to be later than that included in the previous projection, which anticipated the building to be income producing in September 2007.

A wide marketing of the Historic Resources Centre at Hyde was undertaken earlier this year, the results of which will be reported to the next Cabinet. The original assumptions as to the likely capital receipt were confirmed by the level of bids, although the ability of the Council to proceed has been delayed by resolving minor title problems and finding a suitable relocation facility for the museum artifacts. In the original assumptions, as it was anticipated that the artifacts could be accommodated in an existing Council store building. A detailed feasibility study has subsequently concluded that the building would not be cost effective to use, as the cost to move the material and provide appropriate environmental conditions was more than expected. A report to the next Cabinet will outline the options for future museum storage.

Advice from the Council's agents suggests that best consideration from the sale of Hyde is likely to be achieved on a 'subject to planning' basis, with an exchange of contracts but a delayed legal completion until after the grant of a planning consent. With the nature of the buildings, a period of 12-18 months after the exchange of contracts could be expected.

The financial implications of the delays in receipt of income for the letting of Avalon House and the disposal of Hyde have had an adverse impact upon the revenue projections, which included the office move costs. Without seeking to pre-empt any decision about the future museum storage, a revised cash flow estimate has been

drawn up which now includes the projected revenue cost of a new 500 sq m replacement museum store facility and associated move costs. If completed, this would represent an asset and service enhancement, not included in the previous projection.

The following figures compare the original estimate cash flow, as reported in September 2006, with the current estimates. This shows a net cash flow contribution due to the timing of in contract payments in the last financial year, with a knock-on effect into the current year added to the adverse impact of the delay of the disposals.

Year	Original Cash Flow	Revised Cash Flow	Difference
2006-07	92	-195	-287
2007-08	135	576	441
2008-09	-131	97	228
2009-10	-131	-49	127
2010-11	-131	-128	3

[Negative figures represent a saving from budget]



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Spender

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“Will the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the status of the Museum collections currently at Hyde? When will they be moving and where will they be moving to?”

Reply

“A report on the future of Hyde will be included on the agenda for the July meeting of Cabinet. This will set out the results of the market testing for Hyde carried out earlier in the year, and options for future storage of the collections stored at Hyde for consideration by Members.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Higgins

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

“Could the Portfolio Holder inform us whether houses sold on the open market have been sold at the highest possible price?”

Reply

“Of the three vacant Council dwellings offered for sale on the open market, all were marketed by local estate agents on an ‘offers in excess of a guide price’ basis. Sales of all three have been agreed at the highest price that could be achieved on the open market. All three have achieved sales prices well in excess of original guide valuations.

For two of the properties, the highest bid was accepted and in both cases, the final sale price was in excess of £50,000 higher than the guide price.

For the third property, the two highest bids proved not to be in a position to proceed with the purchase. The third highest bid was therefore accepted. This was still £12,000 higher than the guide price.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Worrall

To: The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Communications

“Over 4000 working days are lost to sickness/absence within Winchester City Council each year, an average of 10 days per employee.

1. Could the Portfolio Holder quantify the number of days per employee per year by department within the City council?
2. The current sickness/absence target is 8 days per employee per year. Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied that this target is sufficiently stretching?”

Reply

“The sickness absence figure for the period April 06 to March 07 is an average of 9.2 days per employee, which equates to a total of 4477 days lost to sickness absence. Currently the top quartile figure for district councils is an average of 8.29 days lost per employee.

The current sickness absence target for 08/09 is 8 days per employee which will represent a total reduction in sickness absence levels of 2.2 days per employee over the 2 year period from 05/06 to 08/09.

A report was recently presented to Personnel Committee outlining a number of actions to reduce current sickness absence levels to meet the sickness absence target and exceed it in 2008/09, placing the Council amongst the best performing District Councils.

Sickness absence levels are shown by Division indicating where the absence figure includes cases of long term sickness absence (defined as 40 or more consecutive days). The Human Resources Division provides detailed absence monitoring information to managers to assist with the management of sickness absence within divisions, with specific actions linked to specific cases.

(Divisional Absence information attached – the information relates to the period April 2006 to March 2007. The absence figures given are split into divisions under the old corporate structure as the changes in structure did not take effect until May 2007, outside of the period reported. Future absence information will be shown in accordance with the new organisation structure.)

<u>Directorate</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Absence Days</u>	<u>FTE in post</u>	<u>Ave days sick</u>	<u>Incl long term</u>
Chief Executive	CX	33	2	16.5	
	Performance & Management	35	2.56	13.7	
	Policy	11	4	2.8	
	Strategic Planning	17.5	6.22	2.8	
	Directors	27	6	4.5	
		<u>123.5</u>			
CSS	Legal Services	99	20.59	4.8	
	Secretariat	54	11.29	4.8	
		<u>153</u>			
Communities	Business & Admin	68	5	13.6	
	Community Development	190	19.44	9.8	69%
	Health & Environment	207	32.06	6.5	
	Housing Landlord	1178	85.66	13.8	49%
	Straegic Housing	162	20.41	7.9	
		<u>1805</u>			
Development	Access & Infrastructure	248.5	40.61	6.1	
	Building Control	46	10.99	4.2	
	Cultural Services	420.5	43.21	9.7	31%
	Dev Business & Admin	16.5	3	5.5	
	Estates	15	6.43	2.3	
	Planning	333	40.91	8.1	48%
		<u>1079.5</u>			
Finance	Customer Services	299	23.33	12.8	31%
	Financial Services	273.5	18.5	14.8	42%
	IM&T	155.5	12.22	12.7	32%
	Revenues	559	52.29	10.7	7%
		<u>1286.5</u>			
HR		29.5	4.65	6.3	



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Does the Portfolio Holder believe that the County Council's latest initiative to try to reduce the speed of cars driving past schools is an adequate response to the growing public support of a statutory twenty mile an hour speed limit in residential areas?”

Reply

“The County Council's Twenty's Plenty scheme, which will be launched later this year, will be targeted at areas around schools in response to the Government's target for all schools to have Travel Plans by 2010 and to help reduce road casualties.

It is anticipated that Schools will be invited to submit bids for 20mph zones/areas in the vicinity of the school and details of the process are currently being drawn up by Hampshire County Council.

The Twenty's Plenty scheme, together with the new Village 30mph programme, is considered to be a good addition to the Local Transport Plan Road Safety programme. Other budgets exist to tackle known casualty problem areas and for traffic management and traffic calming.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Cooper

To: The Leader

“Without pre-empting the final report of the ABC panel can the Leader give an overview of the success (or not) of the Alternate Bin Collection Review and give an assurance that Cabinet will consider any recommendations brought forward by the panel at the earliest opportunity. Can he indicate when that is likely to be?”

Reply

“My Alternate Bin Collection (ABC) Special Advisory Panel concluded its four meetings on 25 June 2007 and it is hoping to finish its work and make available its report to me in the next three weeks. To say any more at this stage would be to pre-empt the work of the Panel, but I can assure the Council that the outcomes will be reported as soon as is practicable.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety

“Is the Portfolio Holder aware of any flooding problems in the District following or during the recent periods of heavy rain?”

Does the City Council have any responsibility at all for the maintenance of public drainage systems?

Is there any involvement with Hampshire County Council or the Water Authorities concerning highways drainage or sewerage disposal systems?”

Reply

“There were 5 dwellings in Pound Lane, New Alresford flooded after a storm on the evening of Saturday 9 June 2007. Hampshire County Council (as Highway Authority) is looking at improvements to the highway drainage system in this location to try to reduce the likelihood of a reoccurrence. Although there may have been other incidents in the District, no other reports have been received by the Drainage Section.

Public sewers are the responsibility of Southern Water to maintain, with the Highway Authority looking after the highway drainage system. Where highway water enters a public sewer, Southern Water assumes responsibility.

Winchester City Council is responsible for maintenance of private drainage on certain council housing sites where adoption by the sewerage undertaker was never made (eg Battery Hill, Bishops Waltham).

If any incident relating to flooding from public sewers or highway drains is reported to Winchester City Council, then the Drainage Section will investigate and notify the appropriate body of the fault.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

“Can I be advised of the definition of the term ‘local’ in respect of ‘affordable’ housing allocations?”

Reply

“The term ‘local’ in respect of affordable housing allocations is frequently used when allocating rural exception schemes.

A rural exception scheme is usually built on land outside the village development boundary specifically to meet identified local housing need. A development of this type will always be subject to a S106 planning agreement which will include as a condition that the scheme is allocated to local households.

What constitutes a ‘local’ household is negotiated between the Council, Parish Council, and the Landowner. Usually it is a family (in housing need) who have lived or worked in the Parish for a set period (between 2 and 10 years) or who have a long standing connection and are returning to Parish after having to move away (frequently due to the lack of affordable housing).

If the waiting list of local households is exhausted then families from the neighbouring parishes are considered (on the same basis as previously described).”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Communications

“Does the Portfolio Holder still feel that he should not be responsible for driving forward the Council’s efficiency programme?”

Reply

“It has always been clear that Councillor Allgood leads for the Cabinet on the delivery of our efficiency programme – as did Councillor Learney for the previous administration. All members of the Cabinet are committed to achieving improved efficiency, and we do not feel it necessary to waste time arguing over accountabilities.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Higgins

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

“Could the Portfolio Holder tell me if there has been an increase in complaints about ground maintenance and cleanliness in sheltered housing schemes with the withdrawal of Resident Wardens?”

Reply

“There is no evidence to suggest that schemes without a resident scheme manager experience a higher level of problems with grounds maintenance or cleanliness.

Scheme Managers are still employed at the 14 largest schemes. Schemes with less than 30 sheltered tenants are covered by mobile wardens, although the amount of support provided per resident is similar through both approaches. Both scheme managers and mobile wardens have the same responsibilities regarding grounds maintenance and cleaning.”