



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“In view of the current King Alfred celebrations – the exhibition and lectures at the Discovery Centre (Alfred the Great – Warfare, Wealth and Wisdom) - could the Portfolio Holder please say when the floodlighting will be properly restored to illuminate the statue and not just the plinth?”

Reply

“The current lighting scheme has been in place for several years, although it is not clear why or by whom the earlier one, which was specially designed for the statue, was removed. Officers verified last year that it would not be possible to improve the existing provision simply by using more powerful bulbs or re-angling the fittings.

The subject of floodlighting has been a discussion point during the formulation of the Climate Change Plan. Some residents feel that city centre lighting should be switched off at night to conserve energy and to enable the night sky to be seen more readily. We also know that trials are taking place in other parts of the country to consider whether a reduction of street lighting may contribute to lower antisocial behaviour levels.

However, we also know from consultation work on the evening economy strategy that lighting of various kinds can add to the feeling of safety in the city centre, and floodlighting in particular enhances local monuments and attractions for our significant visitor market.

The current *Alfred* exhibition at the Discovery Centre has prompted two enquiries in recent weeks about the floodlighting on the statue in the Broadway. I have therefore asked officers to determine the estimated cost for replacing the current scheme, and asked that a paper be brought to Cabinet detailing these costs in order to seek a formal decision on any capital allocation to a new lighting scheme.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Could the Portfolio Holder please assure me that the Strategic Development Area (SDA) of up to 10,000 homes to be built north of Fareham will all be contained within Fareham Borough Council area and not spill over into the Winchester District?”

Reply

“Fareham Borough Council is currently consulting on Issues and Options for its Core Strategy, like the City Council. All of the options contain the built part of the SDA within Fareham Borough, although some associated open space and other ‘green infrastructure’ may need to be in Winchester District. The South East Plan refers to the SDA being ‘within Fareham Borough to the north of the M27 motorway’ (Policy SH.2). It is, therefore, the intention of both Authorities that all the housing will be within Fareham Borough and that there will be areas of open land between the SDA and Knowle and Wickham (also a requirement of Policy SH.2). I will be considering a draft Portfolio Holder Decision Report recommending a response to the Fareham Core Strategy consultation within the next 2 weeks.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader advise me of the up to date position with the Emmaus project in Winchester and briefly what impact he feels this facility will have on the District?”

Reply

“The current status of the Emmaus Project is,

- Granted planning consent - May 2006
- Lease of land agreed with HCC – June 2006
- Housing Corporation grant of £1.1M awarded in September 2007
- Contracts have been signed with building contractor with construction forecast to begin in the spring of 2008.

On 8 February 2008 the Council submitted an application on behalf of the Emmaus Project for funding from the Government sponsored Places for Change Programme for the final £600,000 of capital required for the project. The results of this bid will be known in March 2008.

I have been involved in this project for some time, and worked closely with the charity, and I have every confidence that the Project will help alleviate homelessness and restore dignity and self worth to homeless and socially excluded people. This will be achieved by providing them with the necessary environment, support and skills to work towards independent living and re-integration. Individuals will be encouraged to take control of their lives and contribute to society.

The project will provide 23 individuals at any one time with a home, a job and a small income and will work with residents and the council to find more permanent accommodation when they wish to move on to more independent living.

The Emmaus Hampshire initiative is based upon a model that has had over 50 years to develop as part of a growing global Emmaus Movement. After an initial start-up period of 3-4 years, the project will become self-financing operating as a social enterprise, trading in second-hand goods for social purposes and re-investing its surpluses in the Community and other local charitable initiatives that promote social change and independence and demonstrate need.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Is the Portfolio Holder aware that it is possible to amend the Highways Agency Agreement with the County so as to enable the City Council to undertake changes to Speed Limits on County Roads in our District?”

Reply

“Speed limits are a reserved matter under the Traffic Management Agency Agreement. It would be the County Council’s decision as to whether speed limits are dealt with by County Council officers or by the City Council. In certain circumstances the County Council does ask their Agents to progress speed limits but the majority are dealt with by the County. The City Council could also ask to progress a speed limit if it was felt necessary to do so but again this would need the agreement of the County Council.

Any such decisions would include consideration of available resources.

The Agency Agreement is currently being reviewed but I am not aware of any proposals to amend it in relation to speed limits.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

“Would the Portfolio Holder state how many new housing for rent homes have been funded from the resources achieved from Council House sales?”

Reply

“A total of £649,500 is currently available to fund new affordable housing following the sale of 5 council owned properties.

Potential rented schemes have been identified at West Meon (exception scheme), Winchester, Cheriton and Alresford which are existing private developments where additional affordable housing can be provided. In total there are 20 additional rented units across these 4 schemes that can be funded from the Council House sales programme.

Achieving actual spend on new schemes has been slower than initially envisaged. However, any expenditure is unlikely to occur within the year the monies are raised as the planning/development process takes several years before completed houses are available for occupation, unless they are bought ‘off the shelf’. Additionally, several schemes that were potential sites for funding from the Council’s resources have been funded by the Housing Corporation from slippage of the National Affordable Development Programme. So far our RSL partners have received an additional £2.5 million this year to fund local schemes. This has affected the ability to find schemes to fund from the Council’s resources, but additional affordable housing has been provided at no cost to the Council.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“Can the Portfolio Holder provide the usage statistics for the 12 weeks since the Discovery Centre opened?”

Reply

“Figures are currently available for the first ten weeks of operation of Winchester Discovery Centre, from 27 November 2007 to 3 February 2008. During this period, 82,104 users were recorded, and we already know that the 100,000th customer entered the building during the second week of February. During the ten week opening period 2,595 new members were recorded.

In the opening week, 11,078 people visited the centre. The quietest week during the period was the last one with an average daily total of 788. A more standard day appears to bring 1,200 to 1,300 customers.

To provide some kind of comparison with previous performance, December 2007 at the Discovery Centre saw a 52% increase in numbers over the combined total for the former lending and reference libraries in December 2005.

In January 2008, the ‘people count’ for the new centre was 58% up on the combined figures for 2005 and 69% up on 2006 when the lending library was in temporary premises.

Winchester City Council’s own City Space has been popular with 7,000 visitors to its inaugural exhibition on Jewry Street and a great deal of positive feedback. The average number of visitors per week for the exhibition was 589 during December 2007/January 2008, compared with an approximate average of 205 per week for the former Guildhall Gallery when it was open for exhibitions in December 2006/January 2007.

Feedback from Discovery Centre customers as a whole has been almost uniformly complimentary, with particularly positive comments on

- design and functionality of building
- the range of books available.
- the varied range of use of the building
- the café/bar area”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Chairman of Licensing and Regulation

“a) How many Taxis does the Council presently licence, that are capable of carrying wheelchair users or others with mobility problems?”

b) How many of these vehicles or drivers presently have exemptions for health or other reasons from having to carry wheelchair users?”

Reply

“The Council has granted licences for 71 hackney carriages which are capable of carrying wheelchairs.

Four hackney carriage drivers have medical exemptions from carrying wheelchairs.”



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COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Huxstep

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport

“Will the Portfolio Holder report on whether the consultation process for the LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options paper resulted in a statistically significant response on which the Council will be able to proceed on a sound publicly supported basis?”

Reply

“The Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation prompted a huge response to the questionnaire and the public workshops which were arranged. Over 1000 people attended the 7 public workshops that were arranged. The closing date for comments has only recently passed and the comments received have not yet all been logged or acknowledged. However, it is clear that responses to the on-line questionnaire totalled over 400 and we have received an estimated 2000 questionnaires and letters by post and email.

As the respondents are self-selecting they are not a randomly selected sample, and it could not be claimed that the responses reflect the views of Winchester residents as a whole. However, all residents had the opportunity to contribute and the responses provide a substantial input to the process of producing a ‘Preferred Options’ document and will be taken into account alongside the further assessments and technical studies which are required. Ultimately, full Council will decide on the Preferred Options, taking account of the public comments, technical evidence and other requirements.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Nelmes

To: The Leader

“Can the Leader let us know what steps the City Council is taking to ensure the survival of small businesses within the City?”

Reply

“Winchester City Council works closely with the Winchester City Centre Partnership and the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce on a day to day basis to support small businesses in the city. A *selection* of recent or current projects includes:

- Christmas trade – continued financial support and officer expertise to support the Cathedral’s Christmas events, which this year drew around 200,000 people to the city centre and generated significant national and local media coverage, as reported to the last session of Full Council.
- The Winchester Business Improvement District (BID) – ongoing support for this initiative, which includes in its first year plans for major retail marketing campaigns; increases to seasonal decorations across the city and the exploration of shared services which could reduce overheads for small businesses.
- The Winchester Business Centre – we have led this project, to create a venue for businesses to work, meet and hold events and seminars at affordable rates, as well as to access business support and training to help them thrive and grow.
- The Winchester Town Access Plan – now under development in partnership with Hampshire County Council, this long term plan will increase the attractiveness of our secondary shopping areas where many small businesses are located.
- Local enhancements - such as the partial pedestrianisation of The Square which was requested by retailers, and support for the Hat Fair’s decorated bollards project which has increased the attractiveness of the area.

- Marketing initiatives - such as the Hampshire Hospitality Awards, won so far by 13 city centre eateries who are benefiting from additional promotion as a result of their participation in this quality programme. There are also speciality shopping sections in the *Winchester Visitor Guide* and on the tourism website, and national journalists are routinely taken into the city centre to explore the more distinctive local businesses.
- Training opportunities – including ‘Going for Growth’ (in March and April this year) to help small businesses expand and a tailor-made customer care for taxi drivers to enhance their service, and seminars aimed at helping businesses with the smoke free legislation, new fire regulations and other topical issues.
- Green Leaf Tourism Scheme - developed for the accommodation sector, many of whom are small bed and breakfast or guesthouse businesses in the city. This helps small businesses to work in more environmentally friendly and sustainable ways including energy efficiency, using local produce and reducing waste.
- Meet the Buyer – an annual forum to help small businesses meet and sell to big regional purchasers.
- Basepoint – planned provision of incubator business units at Winnall to foster enterprise in the city.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Further to discussions raised at the last Local Economy Scrutiny Panel, can the Leader advise me what action will be taken in addressing the need for much better signage for the secondary business/retail locations off the High Street and when or if he anticipates anything actually being done?”

Reply

“Signage in and around Winchester High Street is closely controlled to avoid unsightly clutter in the town and to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. The planned refurbishment of the High Street – scheduled to start in autumn 2009 with signs being installed towards the end of the project in 2010 - provides the most appropriate opportunity to replace and enhance the current network of pedestrian signs in a way which supports the retailers and is sympathetic to the historic street scene.

Following the last Local Economy Scrutiny Panel, officers have also been in further discussions with the traders of Parchment Street regarding the best use of funding identified for the archway which they have requested at the junction of Parchment Street and St George’s Street to increase the visibility of the street. A modified artistic commission could allow funds to be set aside for the kind of retail signage discussed at the Panel meeting, subject to the relevant planning consents. The feature itself is being designed by national artist Marzia Colonna, and its installation will generate a significant level of media coverage and public interest in Parchment Street. Pending confirmation of the capital funding from Cabinet in April and also planning permission, the installation of the commission and potentially a new sign would take place in May/June this year.

Three new finger posts directing pedestrians to specialist shopping streets were erected last year, and these have been supported by a dedicated speciality shopping leaflet and new pages on the tourism website to stimulate interest in the secondary shopping areas. These and other measures to support retailers in our secondary shopping streets were outlined in my reply to Cllr Tait at Full Council last June.

However, visitor research indicates that signage is generally considered to be good in the city centre and the success of traders in The Square suggests that it is important to marry signage with other proactive initiatives. The Winchester BID will provide for new retail-focused marketing campaigns in the region, and generate funds for additional street dressing right across the city centre which will encourage greater exploration of the secondary retail areas. The Winchester Town Access Plan now under development with Hampshire County Council will also propose improvements which will make the secondary retail areas more attractive and 'user friendly'.

Any additional signage would require a further allocation of capital funds by the Council. Any signs purchased and installed in the immediate future may need to be removed and replaced to conform with the new scheme for signage which would be part of the High Street refurbishment programme but has yet to be developed."



COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

“Was the Portfolio Holder aware of a communication sent to a number of private households requesting access for inspection purposes, which is reported to have caused some concern, because it was not clear as to the purpose of the inspection or what use was going to be made of the information?”

Would he state if the script for all communications to members of the public is approved by the relevant Portfolio Holder before dispatch?”

Reply

“I assume Councillor Cook is referring to the Private Sector House Condition Survey that was recently completed by the Council’s contractor David Adamson Partnership.

All Members were advised via the Members Briefing Note of 28 September 2007 that the Council was carrying out a survey of private properties in the district as required by the Government on a 5 yearly cycle. The note explained the purpose of the survey and that participation was not obligatory and confidential. Inspections commenced in October and no un-announced visits were made.

The letter that was sent out to a random sample of the District’s private properties, explained all of the above points and stressed the confidentiality and security aspects for participants, as well as what the survey of their property actually entailed. Approximately 3000 letters were sent in order to achieve the representative sample of 1000 properties inspected. A small number of these inspections were carried out in January 2008, following a further letter, as one particular area of the District had too small a sample to make it statistically robust.

A small number of complaints have been received by officers, but these have generally been regarding the survey as an invasion of privacy and an underhand way of increasing property valuations for council tax purposes. Only one complaint has been received by officers about the lack of clarity of the letter and the purpose of the inspection.

The letter sent out to residents asking for their assistance by participating in the survey was not subject to Member approval. However, the survey was approved as part of the Business Plan process and budgeted for during 2006/2007. The lack of a Private House Condition Survey was subject to criticism by the Audit Commission in their inspection of the Strategic Housing Service in December 2006. Therefore, the need to carry out this work formed an important part of the improvement plan for the Private Sector Service. The results of the survey will be used to inform the new Private Sector Strategy and will allow resources to be targeted at addressing important issues of property disrepair and fuel poverty. The survey also estimates the CO2 omissions of the District housing stock and forms the baseline for calculating future reductions in line with Government targets.”



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Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Wright

To: The Leader

“Would the Leader agree that the advice on Probity and the Local Development Framework, given to Members by the City Office in recent e-mails is justified, as it limits both the Members right to speak their mind and seems to directly conflict with the requirement by Government for Members to be ‘champions of the community’?”

Reply

“The advice was given by the Monitoring Officer, after requests made by some Members. It related to the legal requirement for Members who will make the final decision, to maintain an open mind and not to unequivocally commit themselves to a particular position at earlier stages in the process.

The whole Council will make the decision at the end of the process so the guidance is relevant to all Members.

The guidance was justified and presented members with various options on how they could approach the matter. It pointed out that it was still possible to make comments and still be a decision maker in later stages, provided the comments could not be construed as the individual having made their mind up in advance of all the information becoming available.

It was also possible for a member to campaign unequivocally on a particular position – but that could restrict the ability of a Member to vote at future stages in the process.

The decision on how to approach the matter was for each member.

I recognise that it is easier for Members to express themselves as champions of the community when they are not themselves going to be the decision makers. However, the guidance provided Members with the range of approaches they could take in making comments during the process.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Further to my previous questions on the subject of the footpath running from Airlie Road up along the side of the railway line to St James Lane, can I be advised of any progress made with the County Council in getting improvements to what is a very convenient and useful path?”

Reply

“A meeting has taken place with the County Council’s Rights of Way Map Review Officer. At the meeting it was determined that the route currently has no status in terms of being a public right of way. It was explained that a route such as this one could become a public right of way by virtue of the fact that it has been used as one for a certain length of time. A review of historic Ordnance Survey maps shows that this has indeed been shown as a footpath for many years. However, signs have been erected by the British Railways Board which clearly state that the route is not a public right of way and, as such, it cannot be declared without the agreement of the now responsible body Network Rail.

Network Rail has been contacted and appears to be agreeable to dedicating this land for use as a public right of way, subject to the necessary agreements being put in place. This matter is currently with their Estates section.

Subject therefore to talking to other land owners and reaching agreement with Network Rail, the path could then be designated as a right of way.

Once this has been clarified, the matter of improving it in terms of surface treatments and its future maintenance can be pursued.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Leader

“Could the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety please explain why a review of the Wickham Festival licence was not called for until the first week of February this year?”

Reply

“The time taken prior to the formal request for a review of the licence was due to the need to complete investigations into the breaches of health and safety legislation, prior to a decision whether to prosecute under the Health & Safety at Work Act or call for a license review. The investigations were carried out by a specialist member of staff with expertise in event management, at a time when there were also other pressing priorities, as well as the Christmas/New Year break.

The work required obtaining written statements from witnesses at the event and formally interviewing the event organiser under caution. This latter aspect was delayed by a request from the organiser for a delay, whilst he sought legal advice.

During these investigations, the event organiser has been advised verbally on a number of occasions of the matters requiring attention and questioned at length about these during his formal interview in November 2007. The Head of Environment confirmed in writing on 14 December 2007 the decision to request a license review.

The time taken to complete this work is considered reasonable considering the size of the Commercial Team and its normal workload. The Environment Scrutiny Panel already has plans shortly to establish an Informal Scrutiny Group to consider outdoor events. The Panel are likely to include a review as whether the resources available to deal with outdoor events are sufficient, bearing in mind the increasing number of events, their complexity and the need to follow up enforcement proceedings where appropriate.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Can the Portfolio Holder advise me why in the past the Council used to pollard trees and whether it was considered to be harmful at that stage, and when and why did the Council change this policy?”

Could I also be advised as to what are the criteria used to select trees or shrubs when considered landscaping issues on public land and would the Council’s Landscape Officer feel that planting limes trees on the side of a residential road is sensible or appropriate?”

Reply

“The practice of pollarding was originally intended as a process of continually harvesting a wood crop from a tree to provide materials for building and firewood.

More recently pollarding was incorporated into tree management as a way of reducing the crowns of trees over high value targets such as roads, public open space and play areas.

Pollarding causes a significant imbalance between the root system and the upper parts of the tree. It increases the chances of fungal decay and significantly affects the tree’s biological processes of water, gas and nutrient exchange. In addition, it reduces the tree such that any amenity value becomes very limited until the crown has re-established itself.

Therefore, the process of pollarding is generally accepted within the arboricultural industry as one reserved for extreme situations where a safety issue dictates it (normally a last ditch attempt to save a locally important tree feature whilst a new tree can be established).

Maintaining a pollarding management regime is costly and would probably require many times more resources to continue than current City and County tree budget allocations allow.

As previously pollarded trees re-establish broad, more natural crowns with higher amenity value, these are assessed in safety terms to ensure that good branch attachments have formed in the new crown. If minor works are required on limited number of branches then this is specified. However a return to the original pollard points in one pruning session should always be avoided.

With regard to the criteria used to select trees or shrubs when considering landscaping issues on public land, the approach taken is to seek to balance the various site factors (soil type, topography, site use, surrounding land use, space for future growth), with the need to maintain character and provide strategic tree cover for the future, so there is not really a one size fits all solution.”



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COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2008

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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader inform me whether some Parish Councils in the Winchester District are considered more important partners than others?”

Reply

“No. We are working with several of our larger parishes to progress the ‘hub’ concept, but I have invited all Parish Chairs to an annual discussion of various aspect of our relationship. I have also made it clear that the Council expects all local community representatives to be equal partners in any hub.”