



COUNCIL MEETING – 17 January 2024

Questions by the Public under Council Procedure Rule 19.1

- Each questioner will have 2 minutes in which to ask their question (or may simply state to “refer to the order paper”). The order of the questions to be asked is as set out below and an officer will direct the questioner to the microphone when their name is called by the Mayor.
- If a questioner who has submitted a question is unable to be present, the Mayor may ask the question on their behalf, or invite another Councillor to do so, or indicate that a written reply will be given and published on the website following the meeting. or decide, in the absence of the questioner, that the question will not be dealt with.
- Please note that following the response given by the Councillor, the questioner may also ask a supplementary question which must arise directly out of the original reply.
- The **total** time allocated for questions will *normally* be limited to 20 minutes.
- Written answers will be published to questions submitted (but not supplementary questions) following the meeting and all members of the public who have asked a question will be notified accordingly.

	From:
1	Signe Biddle
2	Philip Hutchinson



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QUESTION 1

From: Signe Biddle

To: The Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan (Cllr Porter)

“Will this administration support and fight for the green gap on the northern part of the site at Sir John Moore Barracks?”

Reply

“In planning, green gaps are normally referred to as ‘settlement gaps’ – and used to refer to space where development is not permitted in order to separate built-up communities. Our draft local plan has one defined between Winchester and Littleton, for example. And the Local Plan also requires the developer of Sir John Moore barracks to make careful consideration of the settlement gap and other green infrastructure between the proposed development site and Littleton.

The area to the north on the Sir John Moore site can't be a green gap, because there is no settlement on the northern side of it requiring separation, so 'green gap' designation is not one that we could successfully defend via the Local Plan process. But can I assume that the site to which you are referring is the piece of land at the north of the site that has been put forward as a potential SINC or Site of Importance for Nature Conservation?

Of course, I fully support the Sir John Moore site having a strong green infrastructure for the benefit of natural world, the residents who will live there and their neighbouring communities and we await the outcomes of two matters before any confirmation can be given:-

1. The results of the consultations at events in November and in early December 2023. We await the views of the public to be published by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, the owners of the site. The next stage of the process will be to create the first concept plan informed by those Public comments, consultations with stakeholders and other studies. After a number of iterations, this will eventually lead to a masterplan for the whole site.
2. The determination by Hampshire County Council of the outcome of the application for a new area of land to become a SINC.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Philip Hutchinson

To: The Cabinet Member for Business and Culture (Cllr Thompson)

"Economic prosperity is of course very important to residents of the city of Winchester. While I acknowledge and commend the impressive achievement of a 5% vacancy rate in Winchester, as highlighted in the most recent Business Barometer Report 48, a critical issue remains unaddressed. The current retail mix, though beneficial for tourism, does not adequately serve the everyday needs of local residents. Many find themselves compelled to travel to neighbouring cities like Southampton for access to national high-street brands.

This situation raises a crucial question about the council's priorities and strategic planning. When will this administration intensify its efforts to align the city's commercial offerings with the needs of its residents? Furthermore, what specific strategies are being developed to attract a more diverse range of retailers to Winchester, ensuring that our vibrant city serves not just visitors but also faithfully represents and caters to the interests and necessities of its community?"

Reply

"Until September 2020, the Council was able to take a strong decisive line on controlling the profile of shops in our High Street through the planning process. Unfortunately, in that month, the Government passed a regulation to change the rules of 'use classes' so that a shop could change to a café or vice versa without getting planning permission.

And this is exactly what has happened – not just in Winchester – but also in other centres as well – including Southampton.

As a result, our direct control has reduced. We are, of course, able to control our own properties – but a surprisingly small part of the High Street is under our control.

So if, for example, the owners of Debenhams – who happen to be Surrey County Council – decide to replace a department store with three restaurants – there is nothing we can legally do to stop them.

But we do try to influence the situation. Both the City Council and Winchester BID keep vacant property registers so that businesses can see what is available – and we actively participate every month in the BID board to make sure that we stay close to the views and interests of the business community.

Officers and – when appropriate – Cabinet Members talk with businesses who wish to move to Winchester – and if we can't help them directly then we connect them with someone who can.

We also work with partners who share our views. We've been working to revitalize Middle Brook Street with the new Kings Walk refurbishment – and have been delighted to see how the Brooks Centre has been filling up at the same time. It's great that Sports Direct have come to Winchester for example.

It also isn't just about national chains – although we do have 99 different national chains in our centre – including clothing, electricals, several supermarkets, travel, shoes, sportswear, health and beauty, toys, pharmacy, hardware and banking. In addition, we have a vibrant and growing independent sector which is a really important part of our offer adding to our diversity and ensuring that smaller retailers are able to operate.

And we also use our own shops – outside the centre – to enable daily shopping a short walk from residents' homes.

Our plans for Central Winchester Regeneration will also help our centre continue to thrive.

Every High Street is facing change. Out of town shopping. The internet. Changing work patterns. It would be amazing if nothing changed.

Given these pressures, Winchester's High Street is one of the best performing in the country with only 5% vacancy rate and consistently high footfall that other centres can only dream about. We need to celebrate this and of course do what we can to ensure that it continues to be the case."