



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 January 2022

Questions by the Public
under Council Procedure Rule 15(1)

QUESTION 1

From: Andy Lai

To: The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management (Cllr
Learney)

“Local businesses are struggling to stay afloat as we all get used to living with COVID. Independents in particular depend on the support of their local Councils to make sensible decisions to help keep them trading.

Despite this, we are seeing two businesses being evicted from Kings Walk, and barely a week goes by when we don't read of a business having to close their doors due to their Council landlord not being prepared to come to sensible accommodations on rent and other charges.

How will this administration commit to supporting the local business community?”

Reply

“The Council is fully committed to supporting the local business community with over £5m of discretionary and £45m of mandatory government grant funding to support businesses most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic has been administered by the council since the beginning of the pandemic. This has provided a day to day life line for many businesses and has also helped businesses transform and adapt their business models to reflect the changes in the operating landscape and diversify their offer to create sustainable businesses for the longer term. Further funding will be made available in the coming weeks for businesses in the rates system via the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure grant and a discretionary grant payment via the Additional Restrictions Grant to hundreds of recipients across the district

As well as the grant programme, support for businesses is being offered through a number of channels including Covid specific business support and advice services, dedicated marketing campaigns to raise awareness and drive footfall and the introduction of a fully funded for the first year district wider e-

commerce platform. Coming up, independent businesses will benefit from further initiatives which will continue to raise consumer awareness and drive footfall, including a light up Winchester event at the end of January along with dedicated promotional materials for all the market towns and the city

In addition, the council considered requests for rent holidays from its own tenants as a result of the pandemic. In total £572,000 of rent has been foregone from 60 tenants with the intention to support tenants in genuine need and assist them navigate through the worst of the pandemic without irreparable harm to tenant businesses.

The Council is also committed to bringing forward the long awaited Central Winchester Regeneration area to deliver the vision of the Central Winchester Regeneration Supplementary Planning Document and bring resilience the local economy. To support our local and independent creative businesses, a key priority is to breathe new life and activity to the area in and around Kings Walk which will be an important step towards the long-term transformation of the wider area.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Signe Biddle

To: The Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery (Cllr Tod)

“In the Winchester Movement Strategy Proposal, it is mentioned that bus access for the proposed new northern park and ride on the Andover Road Corridor, could be maintained alongside the proposed walking and cycling corridor, along the closed Andover Road North, once traffic is re-routed through the Kings Barton estate via Winchester Avenue. It states that this would “require a re-design of the agreed developer proposed junction at Andover Road/Harestock Road Junction”, and indeed I understand Cala Homes would have to submit a variation to planning permission. What is the current status, has the developer been asked to do this?”

Reply

“In answering this, I need to declare a personal and non-prejudicial interest in that I am also a Hampshire County Council representative on Kings Barton Forum.

A planning application to revise the design of the northern Kings Barton junction cannot practically happen until Hampshire County Council and Cala Homes have agreed on a new design for that junction – and that is not currently the case. A junction design that is opposed by Hampshire County Council will not be approved. A junction design that is not supported by Cala Homes will not be built – since they have full and irrevocable permission granted by the Secretary of State to build the currently approved junction design should they wish to do so. We continue to pressure both parties to come an agreement on the earliest possible timing. In the unlikely event that neither party submits a planning application following an agreement to a new junction design, we will be more than happy to ask the parties involved to do so.

It is important to note that fulfilment of the highways element of planning permission 09/02412/OUT / APP/LI765/A/10/2126522 given permission by the

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on October 2, 2012 following agreement to the Andover Road diversion by Hampshire County Council in their statement of common ground in January 2011, as well as the s278 and highways S106 requirements for Kings Barton agreed by Hampshire County Council on March 11, 2011 are a matter for Hampshire County Council. The City Council has no power or authority on highways matters – and, obviously, neither Hampshire County Council nor Winchester City Council has the power to override a decision made by the Secretary of State for Local Government.

The scheme could be changed if an amended planning application for the northern junction were brought forward by Cala or Hampshire County Council as and when an agreement for a junction redesign is reached – and the application were subsequently approved. The design of the northern Andover Road Junction is for a large scheme which may benefit, from an urban design perspective, from a redesign – for example, pedestrian and cycle provision within the currently agreed design is no longer consistent with modern standards - and consideration is also being given to including access for Park & Ride buses only along Andover Road. As stated in the Movement Strategy consultation paper.

When through traffic is re-routed via the Kings Barton development, bus access for Park & Ride services could potentially be retained on Andover Road alongside the walking, cycling and local access corridor (an option that was outlined in the Movement Strategy adopted in 2019); this would require a re-design of the agreed developer proposed junction at Andover Road/Harestock Road.

The Northern Park & Ride remains a critical priority to cut city centre traffic and pollution, by encouraging people travelling to Winchester from the north to switch to Park & Ride buses to access the city centre – and, as stated above, given Cala's irrevocable right to build the current junction design, any change will need their consent.

Through the Winchester City Council's leadership of the Kings Barton Forum, we continue to encourage both parties involved in the highways design to come to an agreement on the fastest possible timing. We also continue working with Hampshire County Council via the City of Winchester Movement Strategy to ensure that the County Council works on all the traffic issues in the northern part of the city and comes up with the comprehensive highways plan that addresses the traffic concerns of all residents across the area – including those living on Andover Road itself.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Kim Gottlieb

To: The Leader (Cllr Thompson)

“When I initiated a Judicial Review in 2014 in respect of Silver Hill, it was after I had spent three years trying to persuade the Council that its strategy was flawed and that the scheme would harm the city. I had some robust conversations with Cllrs Beckett, Woods and Humby but, under pressure from officers and advisors it seemed that the train had left the station, and no-one was prepared to put the brakes on.

The rest is history. The Council was lambasted in the High Court for behaving unlawfully, and the Claer Lloyd-Jones enquiry found that the chief cause for the Council getting into a mess was the way in which the project was managed and the way in which councillors were advised.

When, at the beginning of 2016, Cllr Godfrey realised that the project was going nowhere and pulled the plug, the present Leader, Cllr Thompson, was one of those who opposed the idea of terminating the contract with Henderson. To be fair, she wasn't alone and at the time the majority of councillors were pretty unhappy with the outcome of my actions.

Since then, I am told, most of those councillors have had a change of heart about the Henderson scheme, and that even some of my fiercest detractors acknowledge that what would have been a disaster for the city was averted.

My question to the Leader tonight is, with the benefit of hindsight, does she accept that the stopping of the Henderson scheme was a good thing or would she still prefer that it had it been built out as planned?”

Reply

“Hindsight is a wonderful thing however Mr Gottlieb's memory has not served him well as I was the Councillor who proposed the motion to terminate the contract with Henderson. It had widespread cross-party support and was carried. More importantly our focus is now on bringing forward a scheme that is right for the city and the district.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Martin Wilson

To: The Leader (Cllr Thompson)

“There have been four recent Judicial Review proceedings regarding decisions about land controlled by the Council and so far, all legal challenges to those decisions have been successful. The High Court decided that the Council acted unlawfully over Silver Hill in 2015, and this caused the resignation of the then Leader and Cabinet. The High Court again found against the Council in 2019 and thereafter the Council has conceded that its decisions in respect of Station Approach and the Vaultex site at Bar End were unlawful.

Assuming the Council concedes in the fifth threatened Judicial Review that it has once again acted unlawfully, this will be unprecedented.

These unlawful decisions have been taken while the Chief Executive, Laura Taylor, the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Asset Management have held their positions.

Accordingly, how can the Council justify these individuals remaining in post?”

Reply

“Thank you for your question Mr Wilson but your question contains factual inaccuracies and only one side of the story.

The number of cases since 2018, which I consider to be a relevant recent period, shows that we have successfully defended more than double the cases we have conceded. 3 of those cases that we successfully defended went all the way to the High Court.

In 2 of the cases that went to the High Court (and which the city council conceded) we did respond to the claims to confirm that if a timely pre action

letter had been issued by the claimant, as required by civil procedure rules, court action may well have been avoided entirely.

I, the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset management and the Chief Executive have been in our roles when the council have continually responded to the high demands of a global pandemic, the likes of which have not been seen in our lifetimes.

We have balanced the most challenging of budgets in my memory. Staggeringly, despite this, we completed a record number of new council homes, opened one state-of-the-art leisure centre, refurbished another, rolled out millions of pounds in grant aid, developed an innovative new digital high street while working with Visit Britain to help our tourism businesses recover and rolled out a new Garden Waste collection service.

We've engaged with our residents continually, updating the Council Plan to improve life in the district; and we've published a Biodiversity Action Plan; a Green Economic Development Strategy; the HRA Asset Management Strategy; the North Walls Park Plan and both a Procurement and Contract Management Strategy and a Customer Charter. And it doesn't stop there – we're currently in the process of carrying out a new Residents' Survey to see how our district's residents have fared during this difficult time.

We've netted awards left, right and centre – a double win at the RTPI awards for our Local Plan work, a Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation Award and another (in fact the tenth) RSPCA Gold award for our Animal Welfare team.

We've seen remarkable progress on regeneration – we have Central Winchester before us this evening as well as St Maurice's Covert; the Vaultex multi-storey car park and Bishop's Waltham Depot all progressing despite the pandemic.

We've kept our own premises ticking over, welcoming the return of visitors in the Visitor Information Centre and reopened our Customer Service Reception whilst arranging for Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service to operate from the Guildhall.

As Leader of the council I would therefore only take this opportunity again to thank my Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Executive and all officers for all their hard work and all they have achieved for the residents and businesses of our district.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Sam Feltham

To: The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management (Cllr
Learney)

“Despite many reasonable requests from local residents to follow a proper public consultation process for River Park the council have charged ahead with the University of Southampton's proposal. With that in mind, will this administration and the University at least fully commit to an open and transparent public consultation for their proposal before the end of June 2022, that should include publishing anonymised data collected during that process for public analysis?”

Reply

“The University has made public commitment to working collaboratively with the public while they develop their Masterplan for the River Park Site. These commitments were made at the public forum held on 1 November and when answering questions during the Cabinet meeting of 23 November 2021.

The Council cannot prescribe what the University will publish as part of their strategic consultation(s), nor their timings as we have no remit to do so. However, the Council expects the University to provide opportunity for the public to engage with, and comment on, their emerging aspirations for developing the land as part and parcel of bringing forward a Masterplan for the site.”