



Library of – Council Questions Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 10

Wednesday 13 September 2023, 7.30 pm

1. **Councillor Harrison asked Councillor Purnell**

Councillor Harrison asked Councillor Purnell, Executive Member for Environment and Councillor Harrison asked Councillor Purnell, Executive Member for Environment and Community Cohesion the following published question:

Would the Executive Member responsible for liaison with community groups please update the Council on what they have done to ensure a viable future for the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare?

In response, Councillor Purnell, Executive Member for Environment and Community Cohesion provided the following published response:

I agree with Councillor Harrison that the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare site is a valuable asset which has had a positive impact on a wide range of communities. Including people with mental, physical, and learning disabilities giving them an opportunity to work together in the fresh air, build their confidence, develop new skills and find support for their health and wellbeing.

A recently bereaved lady found a new way of life after visiting the site. "It's a very special place," she says. "I was a bit apprehensive and overwhelmed to start with but spending time at Jealott's Hill and enjoying its fresh air, wildlife and flowers has helped me overcome my grief to some extent. Bereavement caused me to seek new friends and opportunities and here, that's exactly what I get" This quote was taken from Royal Horticultural Society website who call the project "An innovative community growing space.....a source of solace and new beginnings"

I don't think there is a single person in this room or watching this meeting today who does not agree that every effort must be

made to save this precious Landshare. I am working closely with council officers, the Friends of Jealotts Hill Community Landshare and partners to identify ways in which the Landshare can be sustained. The site is owned by Syngenta and has been leased to Silva Homes who have been the lead organisation in managing the Land share and employing the staff that work there. Silva Homes have given Syngenta notice on the lease and the site closed at the end of August to the public with activity since, focussed on tidying the site and handing it back to Syngenta at the end of September. Silva Homes have cited the ongoing financial liability for the operations of the site with decreased levels of use since the Covid pandemic and it not being aligned to their strategic priority to invest in the communities they operate in.

Since being made aware of the possible closure of the site the Council has had several meetings with Silva Homes including one with Syngenta to understand the issues, liabilities, and opportunities for sustaining the Landshare. The council's Chief Executive has written to the Chief Executive's of both Silva Homes and Syngenta to request a meeting and further discussion. I have also personally met with the Chair of the Friends of the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare to offer my support in trying to sustain the project. Options to sustain the Community Landshare include establishing a CIC (Community Interest Company) are being explored with the support of Involve Community Services. The Council has also been looking to identify alternative organisations whose aims align with the Landshare who may be interested in taking on a lease and management of the site.

I can assure Cllr Harrison that I am committed to supporting and working positively with the Friends of the Jeallotts Hill Community Landshare, fellow borough, town and parish councillors, as well as partner organisations like Involve. I will do all I can to ensure a viable future for the Landshare and look forward to further discussions with him on the next steps in doing so.

Councillor Purnell agreed that Councillor Harrison could send his supplementary question to her outside of the meeting.

2. **Councillor Virgo asked Councillor Wright**

Councillor Virgo asked Councillor Wright, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing the following supplementary question:

I understand that there is to be a review of the sexual health services all over shortly, I would like to ask the Executive Member to whether she would look at other authorities who

provide sexual health services like the London North West Health area in Ealing who take a very different approach by opening every week day to provide their help to those in full time employment and find it difficult to make an appointment.

In response Councillor Wright confirmed that the Council would be looking for a new provider in due course when the current contract ended and would take Councillor Virgo's advice into consideration and would look at the health needs of the community and the best options for the community.

3. **Councillor P Thompson asked Councillor Gillbe**

Councillor P Thompson asked Councillor Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning and Transport the following published question:

Can the Executive Member give an update on this Council's plans for this autumn, 2023, to repair the many potholes in public roads in Bracknell Forest Borough Council area [which are of great concern to many residents] and report to Council, each year, before winter?

In response Councillor Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning and Transport, provided the following published response:

Without doubt, the travelling public are contending with a national pothole problem. Like all highway authorities nationally, the challenge in Bracknell Forest centres around an ageing road network which needs increased maintenance investment.

Whilst the generally difficult winters in the UK, combined with increasingly frequent severe weather events and ongoing traffic demands are all factors in the national pothole problem, there is no doubt that insufficient maintenance funding is at the core of this issue.

Council's receive annual grant funding for highway maintenance from central Government but this has broadly remained at a static level for many years (if not a decade) and the scale of this funding has simply not matched the demands of the ageing infrastructure. And of course, this Government grant is not provided solely for road maintenance, but also for meeting the needs of wider highway assets like street lighting, highway structures and drainage systems. Rising inflation has of course worsened this situation, with some construction materials having increased by over 35% in the past 18 months.

In practical terms, roads have a life-span beyond which they require resurfacing; but this process is expensive and there are

many candidate roads. Even with the additional Council funding provided there is no alternative but to repair potholes in locations where our first choice would otherwise be to provide a whole new road surface. This is not unique to Bracknell Forest and all highway authorities face this reality.

But despite this challenge, the Council must be responsible. We must do all we can to maintain a safe highway network for our residents. This means managing the unavoidable pothole problem in a systematic, responsive and affordable way.

Our engineers continuously inspect and monitor the highways, necessarily making risk assessments to prioritise our resources within the limitations of our funding. Our highway inspectors patrol and identify potholes, but of course the public also play their part by reporting potholes too. There is no doubt, however, without an increase in Government funding this pothole challenge will be relentless.

Throughout the past winter and early spring (broadly October to April) the Council made 709 carriageway repairs, involving 1871 tonnes of road material.

Post winter (from May onwards) there has been a further push to stabilise network condition with 754 carriageway repairs alongside our annual road resurfacing programme – a combined total of 5798 tonnes of material.

Councillor P Thompson asked Councillor Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning and Transport the following supplementary question:

What proportion of our roadways are currently considered to be beyond their expected lifespan and what action is the council taking to address the funding shortfall as it is exacerbating these hazardous conditions?

In response Councillor Gillbe confirmed that the council's engineers undertook an annual condition survey across the boroughs 450kms of road, and that this informed the resurfacing forward plan which was based on a worst first basis. Whilst many candidate roads would be visibly poor in condition, others would be less obvious such as where there were structural weaknesses which is why a data led and responsible approach was important. Currently 11% of the overall road network was in a condition which required resurfacing as it had reached the end of its useful life. This figured matched the average for England and Wales. Despite the shortfall in Government funding, the council had increased its own capital funding towards highway maintenance in recent years. However, no Local Authority will be able to fix

this problem unless supported adequately by government and this was the message that Councillor Gillbe would seek to deliver at the highest level as maintain safety for the travelling public was key. Councillor Gillbe also praised Councillor P Thompson as a passionate advocate for his community, and that his emails to Councillor Gillbe on behalf of his residents were a testament to this. Councillor Gillbe stated that he was happy to meet up with him outside of the meeting to discuss any specific examples within his ward and would be happy to go on a field trip to be shown the evidence.