

**COUNCIL – 8 JULY 2019**

## **QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

### **First Questions**

#### **Question 1**

**From Cllr Mark Clark, to Cllr Jill Cleary, Portfolio Holder for Housing Services**

What level of occupancy and rental arrears are there currently for the NFDC owned garage assets within the Parish boundaries of Hythe & Dibden?

#### **Answer**

The current occupancy of garages in Hythe and Dibden is 74% of the total stock of 203 garages in this area. 85% of the garage tenants are up to date with their rent payments. The remaining 15% of tenants have arrears totalling just over £1,000, an average of £37 per tenant.

Chairman, it is worthy of note that a review is on-going to ensure we maximise rent collection and occupancy for both dwellings and garages.

#### **Question 2**

**From Cllr Steve Davies, to Cllr Mark Steele, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing**

As you know I am a regular user at the Arnewood Health & Leisure centre in New Milton. When I hear mumblings about the centre's future, what simple and concise message can I give to alleviate any concerns?

#### **Answer**

Thank you for your question:

I will endeavour to respond clearly to your question, without mumbling. Presently two reviews are progressing. Primarily, an internal review, the purpose to close the 600K operational loss, which I am pleased to inform all, team leisure is well on target to deliver.

Secondly, a Cross party Health and Leisure Task and Finish Group, with a key Vision and Outcome for the service, and that was agreed at: 3rd May 2018 meeting.

That Vision:

“Working with partners to create active communities by providing affordable, accessible leisure facilities, dedicated to improving physical and mental health and wellbeing and establishing a sustainable healthy lifestyle legacy for future generations”

You ask me for a Clear message:

“We will always own the leisure centres and be responsible for them. Our focus remains to continue to provide community focussed, competitively priced, and fit-for-purpose leisure facilities.”

### Question 3

#### From Cllr Sue Bennison, to Cllr Jill Cleary, Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

We adopted a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in April this year. As we are now one quarter of the way through this year, could the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services advise me on what initiatives or measures have been implemented to help the most vulnerable in our communities?

#### Answer

Work to advance actions agreed in the strategy is well underway. I am delighted to inform you that we have already accommodated 10 households in our new 6 room emergency accommodation facility at Pentagon Court. This is the first of many such projects in the pipeline that will reduce our usage of unsuitable B&B accommodation over the coming year.

Providing accommodation is just one step to helping vulnerable people. I am also pleased to announce that 3 new support workers will complement the existing homelessness team over the next month. An Outreach Worker will respond to reports of rough sleeping and work to gain their trust to assist them to access accommodation and services. A Supported Lettings Worker will help complex clients to sustain their temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation beyond that. A Floating Support Worker will work to provide practical support to vulnerable households to help prevent their homelessness from their existing accommodation. This is the first time that the Council has had posts of this nature and demonstrates our determination and commitment to do the very best for people who find themselves without a home.

Also, a further newly created Private Sector Landlord Liaison Officer post will help us build relationships with Estate Agents and Landlords in the District in order for us to increase the number of homes available for homeless households, whilst also promoting good housing standards and launching our Landlords' Forum.

We continue to work with our voluntary and statutory partners through our Homelessness Multi – Agency Forum to ensure we work in a 'joined-up' way to ensure the best possible outcome for homeless households including single people, which now includes Fortnightly co-location with Drug & Alcohol Services at their drop in sessions.

Chairman, I am extremely pleased with the approach of our Housing Options Service who have embraced this work in the most proactive and professional manner to ensure that no stone is left unturned when it comes to helping and supporting homeless people.

### Question 4

#### From Cllr Christine Ward, to Cllr Edward Heron, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure

We are now entering the fourth week of public hearing sessions as part of the independent examination of the Council's submitted draft Local Plan 2016-2036 Part 1 : Planning Strategy, can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on their progress?

#### Answer

The Hearing Sessions for the Local Plan Examination are just over halfway through.

Topics considered so far include the Duty to Co-operate, general housing policies, including affordable housing targets, Green Belt, the Environment and the need for extensive measures to mitigate adverse impacts from development on internationally important nature conservation sites – notably the New Forest and Solent and Southampton Water, Fawley Power station and other strategic housing allocation sites in Totton and the Waterside, Lymington, Milford on Sea, and Hordle.

Still to come in the next two weeks are sites in New Milton, Bransgore, Ringwood and Fordingbridge, and issues relating to prior extraction of minerals on strategic site allocations and the economy.

The last day of the hearings which is currently programmed for 18th July will bring everything together and look at the overall supply and delivery of housing.

The hearing sessions have been very well attended by a range of development industry interests. In general, these interests have sought changes to the plan to remove or weaken policies that the Council considers important to ensure development is of a high quality, addresses local housing needs and protects the local environment. Many site promoters would wish to see development at higher densities and less environmental controls.

There has also been significant concern expressed by a number of organisations and parties about the potentially harmful impact of development on the nature conservation interests in the district, and the ability to mitigate those impacts. The RSPB informed the Inspector that in their view this was the most difficult local plan area to deal with in the country.

The Inspectors have looked in great detail at the site allocations proposed. In general they consider that the timing of the delivery of most of those sites is over-optimistic, and it is very helpful to the Council that the Inspectors seem to be seeking to ensure the Council has a plan with a realistic 'housing trajectory' which is deliverable and achievable.

In recognition that some of the allocated sites will be particularly complex to deliver, the Council has agreed that it would prepare further development briefs (in association with site promoters) for a number of the larger sites to ensure they come forward in a properly planned way.

The need for further work on our draft revised Mitigation Strategy Supplementary Planning Document has also been highlighted.

## **Question 5**

### **From Cllr Steve Clarke, to Cllr Edward Heron, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure**

Local media has recently reported that planning permissions for new residential development with the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire, PUSH, are not being issued due to the potential impact of new homes on nitrate levels in water locally, Is the New Forest affected?

## **Answer**

At present the New Forest planning area is not impacted by the nitrate issue affecting other nearby planning authorities within the PUSH area.

However, water quality and the impact of additional nitrates is an issue that affects us all, and the Council has been working in partnership with other planning authorities, Southern Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England, through PUSH for some years. The most recent piece of work is the South Hampshire Integrated Water Management Study 2018. New Forest Planners are actively involved in the on-going work relating to water quality through PUSH and the PUSH Water Quality Working Group.

Under the Habitats Regulations there are significant responsibilities conferred on the Council as a 'Competent authority'. Chiefly it requires the Council to only approve plans or projects (such as planning applications and the Local Plan) if there is no likelihood of a significant effect on the internationally protected ecological sites along the Solent coast. This could include many potential impacts including the deposition of nitrogen into the marine environment through wastewater from new development. It is also important to note that this is a legal requirement rather than a planning consideration. It must be proven that there would not be any likely significant affect in order for the council to lawfully grant planning permission.

The European Court of Justice recently determined a case to consider water quality in Appropriate Assessments (known as the Dutch Nitrate Case). As a result of this judgement it can only be concluded that new development, particularly that of a residential nature, could increase nitrogen deposition into the protected harbours of the Solent, this does not include Southampton Water at the present time.

Based upon advice from Natural England, the following authorities have concluded that they cannot issue planning permissions for new residential development; East Hampshire, Havant, Fareham, Gosport and Portsmouth at this time.

## **Question 6**

**From Cllr Ann Sevier, to Cllr Diane Andrews, Portfolio Holder for Community Affairs**

Can you reassure me that the New Forest is tackling the emergence of knife crime that is prevalent in larger cities across the country?

## **Answer**

The safer New Forest Partnership has a long standing and established approach in preventing the misuse and illegal possession of weapons by young people through education and support. The Council and our partners recognise the importance of providing young people with the appropriate information, enabling them to make positive decisions. The development of 'Safe4me' educational and training material for Teaching and Support staff is available for all primary and secondary schools within the District for the delivery of an informative and preventative programme.

At our last Safer New Forest Strategy and delivery group, partners committed to developing further opportunities to ensure the New Forest continues to be a safe place for people to live and visit. Officers of this Council are working with our policing partners with a view to developing further training and preventative opportunities through extra resources made available from central Government to tackle and prevent the emergence of knife crime.

The total recorded crime figures for the New Forest between 1 July 2018 and 1 June 2019 was a total of 10,814 offences. Of this, 29 incidents were for the possession of a weapon, a decrease of one incident from the previous year.

The recorded figure is significantly lower in comparison to the national profile and I can assure members that we will continue to develop and implement opportunities in diverting and enabling young people to make positive choices.

### **Question 7**

#### **From Cllr Christine Hopkins, to Cllr Alison Hoare, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services**

I note that waste and recycling issues, for example concerning the use of plastic, have increased in prominence in local and national media and there is an increasing public interest in such issues. Can the Portfolio Holder advise how the Council aims to increase recycling and reduce waste within the District?

### **Answer**

The Council provides vital waste and recycling collection services from the doorsteps of over 80,000 households a week. The most recent addition to our suite of services was a kerbside collection of glass bottles and jars. However, in recent years, the recycling rate in NFDC, Hampshire, and England as a whole, has remained consistent. In May, this Council provided comprehensive responses to four Government Consultations. These consultations will likely lead to the most significant changes in Government's approach to waste management in the last 20 years. In addition, we are engaging through our partnerships with other Hampshire Councils, to review the current waste processing and recycling infrastructure currently in place in Hampshire. These developments, plus the aforementioned increase in media and public interest, mean that the time is right to develop a new Waste Strategy for NFDC. With that aim in mind I am proposing a Member Working Group to work with Officers on development of such a Strategy. A new Strategy will ensure we are equipped to deal with regional and national developments, and that we can provide a local service that meets the needs of our residents and the wider environment.

### **Question 8**

#### **From Cllr Ian Murray, to Cllr Alison Hoare, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services**

Is the Council aware that Asian Hornets have been found in New Milton? One Asian Hornets nest can destroy whole colonies of bees in a very short time. Does the Council have a plan?

### **Answer**

The Asian hornet (*Vespa Velutina*) is an invasive non-native species from Asia. It can cause significant losses to bee colonies, and potentially other native species.

It is important to report any suspected sightings of this species as soon as possible. Find out how to identify Asian hornet by downloading an identification guide (LINK):

[file:///C:/Users/sara.hamilton/Downloads/ID\\_Vespa\\_velutina\\_\(Asian\\_Hornet\)\\_4.0%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/sara.hamilton/Downloads/ID_Vespa_velutina_(Asian_Hornet)_4.0%20(1).pdf)

Report sightings using the DEFRA app (LINK): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-app-to-report-asian-hornet-sightings>

Vigilance is particularly required in southern parts of England and Wales and around major ports. The Asian hornet is active mainly between April and November (peak August/September)

and is inactive over the winter. Do not under any circumstances disturb or provoke an active hornets' nest.

New Forest District Council treats non-native invasive species very seriously and works with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Hampshire County Council to report all sightings. All non-native species we become aware of on NFDC land are officially reported and treated accordingly.

If you need treatment of an Asian hornets' nest (after you have reported this to DEFRA) please book through Customer Services as a pest control appointment.

More information and Asian Hornet resources can be found at

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm>

### **Question 9**

**From Cllr Malcolm Wade, to Cllr Alison Hoare, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services**

In an NFDC document entitled Position Statement 2019 Annual Performance Report on page 14 it shows a very modest target amount sent for reuse, recycling and composting of over 35%. It also shows this administration failed to reach this target in 2017/18 and 2018/19. Can you advise how this authority is going to hit this modest target figure for 2019/2020?

### **Answer**

Please refer to the answer to question 7.

### **Second Questions**

### **Question 10**

**From Cllr Mark Clark, to Cllr Edward Heron, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure**

Is the Council continuing to engage with Vivid Housing after the debacle of the development on land adjacent to Forest Lodge Farm on Fawley Road, south of Hythe? Specifically, how much has been spent on external consultants, including drainage consultants, and officer time and effort after two years of inaction by Vivid to resolve the situation, and the potential rental loss on these 45 affordable homes project?

### **Answer**

I can confirm that the Planning Service has been working with Vivid to resolve the drainage issue at its site at Forest Lodge Farm. External drainage expertise's has been provided by consultants at a cost of £3,000 Vivid have now been asked for an urgent meeting with Planners as they have not responded within timescales. The entire site is currently owned and managed by Vivid, this is not a site that the Council would be managing the housing stock or receiving rent from. Nevertheless there are 45 houses on this site that could be providing homes, so there is now an urgency for this matter to be resolved.