

FULL COUNCIL – 26 FEBRUARY 2024 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

I'm pleased to see that this Council will be conducting a review of the Local Plan. It is sorely needed. Can the Portfolio Holder promise me that this review will get rid of the stupid policies that allow developers like Churchill free rein to swamp Lymington with luxury retirement flats that locals do not want?

Answer:

You appear to believe that I have great power, to be able to make promises to you based on your perceived knowledge of Lymington's needs. However, I only make promises that I know that I can deliver. I know there are some politicians that promise anything, but not me. It is important to understand how a Local Plan is made. Our officers gave Members a very informative briefing on this on 11 December. Those Members who attended will recall that the review will examine all existing policies to see if they are still fit for purpose.

All our policies will be based on data and evidence such as the most recent Census, which tells us that both nationally and locally we have an ageing demographic, indicating an ongoing need for retirement housing, as well as housing with care and care homes. Of course, we will also require affordable homes and a range of homes of different size, type and tenure.

I know that Lymington and Pennington Town Council have received an offer from our officers to provide the same briefing that our own councillors received. I hope will be taken up so they can fully appreciate the complexities of plan making, which must be led by evidence and data.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on lobbying for change to National Planning Policy, the Portfolio Holder reiterated the need to follow the data and evidence in plan making.

Question 2

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Changes to planning law in October last year make it necessary for any decision by local planning authorities to actively 'further' the interests of the National Park, rather than just not doing anything to its detriment.

How does this relate to what this council would like to see happen to the Dibden Bay site?

Answer:

The Council's formal planning policies on any strategic development proposals at Dibden Bay is set out in policy ECON4 of the Local Plan Part 1 adopted in July 2020.

This sets out a variety of environmental, economic and social matters for consideration – including impacts on the New Forest National Park.

As we begin work on the Local Plan Review, such policies will need to be reviewed, including taking account of the new duty to further the purposes of the purposes of the New Forest National Park.

This Council continues to work closely with the National Park Authority on a wide variety of strategies and projects, for the benefit of our communities both within the National Park, the wider district and more widely.

The outcome of our Local Plan Review will inevitably be a compromise which balances the needs of the National Park, as well as those of local people and the business community. It is not a simple case of what the Council would like to see, but rather the best outcome for our community as a whole.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on Dibden’s Bay relation to emerging planning legislation, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that the Council would be taking into account these issues as part of the Local Plan Review.

Question 3

From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden

The residents of Lyndhurst and Minstead did not receive their black and recycling bin bags as planned in November. It has come to light that many residents in Minstead have not received them for the last five years despite ringing in to request them. What is the Waste team doing to ensure that this will not happen again and that it is not happening in other parts of the Forest?

Answer:

We have been made aware of a limited number of residents not receiving an anticipated delivery of bin sacks, my apologies for any inconvenience. However, this was corrected with follow up deliveries made. These locations have also been noted for future delivery cycles to receive additional monitoring to make sure the deliveries take place as scheduled.

In the medium term, the Council is investing in “in-cab” technology to improve route and round planning to improve the accuracy of services such as this. And of course, I am sure Members will all agree that one of the many positives of our new and improved wheeled bin service, which will maximise recycling rates, will be the fact that we will no longer need nor distribute 10 million single-use virgin plastic sacks per year, which is a massive sustainability benefit.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the use of the Customer Services call centre for establishing trends of complaints, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that the number of complaints the Council received on this issue had not raised the likelihood of widespread missed deliveries.

Question 4

From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden

Following the changes made to our waste strategy, residents now need to accommodate a 240 litre wheelie bin as well as the more regular-sized wheelie bin, food caddy and glass bin.

With over 90% of properties now assessed I am yet to find a resident who is aware of an assessment taking place. Can you confirm the criteria against which suitability has been judged, given it appears no assessment of the physical property has been undertaken? And can you confirm the current percentage of properties that have been assessed as unsuitable? For those which are unsuitable, can you confirm that there will be no additional charges levied to the residents affected?

Answer:

Thank you for highlighting the fact that the number of bins will be no different to that for so many other council areas across the country, and is in line with the clear commitment of the Prime Minister with his announcements on Simpler Recycling last year, and part of our own local commitment to increase recycling here in the New Forest.

I am pleased to confirm that Keep Britain Tidy, who have a wealth of experience on similar projects across the country, have been undertaking the independent survey work. Their experienced surveyors have a list of questions to go through to assess each property, checking for suitable space for bin storage, looking for suitable presentation sites for collection, and assessing for steps or inclines that may make presentation difficult. They have developed software that enables them to link the survey with NFDC's address data to ensure full coverage.

We anticipate that up to 5% of properties may be unsuitable for the full wheeled bin offer, but clearly the majority will be, as they are across the country in both rural and urban areas. Additionally, we have roughly 5500 flats that will likely be provided with communal bins rather than individual wheeled bins.

There will be a review of the work being undertaken by our own operational teams before a decision is made, and we will write to all properties between now and the formal roll out of the new service to confirm. There will be an opportunity for individual concerns to be raised and reviewed thereafter. I am pleased to advise that the current assisted collection provision remains in place for those with extra needs.

We can confirm that no charges will be made for the collection of domestic general waste, food waste and recycling. Charges will continue to apply for the collections of garden waste, bulky waste and business waste.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the percentage of those properties unsuitable for the full wheeled bin offer, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would share the final figure once the assessments had been concluded.

Second Questions

Question 5

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoff Blunden

Will the upcoming parking strategy finally allow parking charges to be specific to local community's needs, with different charges depending on the circumstances of each town?
Answer:

The cross-party Parking Strategy Task and Finish Group has now met twice, and has identified a whole range of issues that the strategy will consider. The scope for the strategy, agreed by the Task and Finish Group, includes a "review of current parking policy" and an intention to "consider the impact that any changes to parking provision, payment methods and rates would have on village town centre workers and businesses".

It is not possible to second guess the outcome of this review, but I hope that this reassures the Councillor that issues such as this will be considered in full as part of the Strategy.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on spending surplus income on public transport, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that Hampshire County Council were responsible of public transport.

Question 6

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Chairman of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee, Cllr Tungate

Taxi Drivers and Operators have been in touch with me to discuss the new "age of vehicle" proposals included in the draft taxi licensing policy. Could the Committee Chairman explain how this would work in practice? Would a car that is currently compliant need to be changed when this new policy comes into force? That could get very costly for drivers and operators.

Answer:

The proposed Taxi Licensing Policy contains new measures relating to the ages of vehicles. Once adopted, there will be no changes enforced on vehicles currently in the taxi fleet. However, from 1 January 2026, such licences will only be renewed for vehicles less than 10 years old.

This proposal supports the Council's priorities on climate change and actions to improve air quality, as well as maintaining a high standard of vehicle fleet for our residents and visitors to the forest.

Members will be aware though, that this is a draft Taxi Licensing Policy, and it is currently out for public consultation until 15 April 2024. We are therefore seeking views from stakeholders, the taxi trade and members of the public. The Council is keen to hear about any potential impacts of the proposals during the 3-month consultation period. Comments received will be fully considered by Members at the General Purposes and Licensing Committee prior to the submission of a final version of a new policy.

Note – in response to a supplementary question seeking to clarify if an eight year old vehicle would qualify if the policy was due to come into force in two years time, the Committee Chairman highlighted that under the proposals out for consultation, if a vehicle was ten years old when the policy came into force, then it would not qualify.