

**Full Council – 16 September 2024 – Questions Under Standing
Order 22**

First Questions

Question 1

**From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and
Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

Can the Portfolio Holder advise the Council on the current state of play regarding the Fawley Waterside development, and provide an update we can share with our Residents who have been concerned by recent developments?

Reply:

As officers explained at the all member briefing on planning, on 3rd September, where topic of the Fawley Scheme was discussed, the planning application for the scheme was withdrawn in June, and the documented reasons for that related to development viability have been well publicised.

Only last week, senior officers from the Place, Operations and Sustainability Directorate met with the investor team, who remain committed to bringing forward the redevelopment of that site. What form that development will take, and over what timescale is to be determined, and will need to go through the planning process.

The investors are aware that the site has a local plan allocation for housing and commercial use, and that there is currently a review of the council local plan. In the meantime, the land remains an allocated brownfield site with potential for development.

Both the Council and the investors confirmed their desire to maintain a positive dialogue around the site, given its development designation and freeport status.

Note – this question was dealt within in writing in the absence of Cllr Clark.

Question 2

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

How much section 106 money is currently being held by NFDC? How much of those funds are time limited and, within the last year, have any monies been handed back to developers as time ran out for it to be spent? In addition, can the Portfolio Holder advise the Council from which developments the funds are currently being held and how much?

Reply:

The Council publishes an annual statement on its website called the 'Infrastructure Funding Statement'. This provides information on the amount of section 106 monies collected, spent and retained and information on the source and amount retained of individual S106 funds. The most recent version covers the financial year 2022-23.

Officers are currently preparing the 2023-24 version and expect to publish this within the next few weeks. As soon as it is available, all Members will be informed of this.

I can confirm that no S106 monies have been returned to developers and none of it is time limited.

A link to the published statement can be found here: ([Infrastructure Funding Statement - New Forest District Council](#)).

Question 3

From Cllr David Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Jeremy Heron

What level of debt remains from unpaid Council Tax bills? How many individuals are in default for over three months and six months and has this Council any outstanding legal actions against householders for unpaid bills?

Reply:

For all years prior to 1 April 2024, we currently have £4.3m in arrears for unpaid Council Tax which we continue to pursue to maximise collection. Not all of this Council Tax arrears relates to that owed to NFDC, but is accounted by us in our role as collection authority.

It is regular practice within the Tax and Benefits department to issue reminder notices, summons and liability orders in accordance with legislation to those that fall behind with their payments. We currently have 5,103 active liability orders with outstanding council tax due and we will work with these customers to pay the council tax outstanding.

Whenever anyone is unable to pay their council tax we always encourage them to contact us to discuss their circumstances so we can agree a way forward.

If any residents do have issues, we need to talk to them so please encourage your residents to contact our tax and benefits department.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the level of debt, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the Council's collection rate as being one of the best in the country at over 98%. He also reiterated how the NFDC figure within the overall total was a small proportion, in view of the Council's role as collection authority for all council tax (County Council, PCC, Fire and Rescue, Town and Parish).

Question 4

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

I understand that moves are taking place to encourage the Environment Agency to develop a flood and erosion plan for the East of the District. This is welcome news for those in Totton and Waterside who already experience flooding. However, having been told previously this would take 8-10 years (more than the timeline the Environment Agency stated previously). What can you report that this Council is doing in the meantime to show Totton and Waterside residents that it is taking this 40 year issue seriously?

Reply:

The responsibility for the delivery of a Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for the eastern side of the district lies with the Environment Agency (EA), as the prime risk is through tidal flooding.

At our request, an officer of the Environment Agency will be attending the Place & Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the new year to outline any proposals for the future development of a FCERM Strategy for the Waterside area.

It should be noted however, that there is no statutory duty for NFDC or the EA to deliver flood and coast protection measures, nor is there any guaranteed funding to deliver any such measures.

NFDC will continue to engage with the EA to consider a strategy that may follow on from the completion of the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy, late 2026.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the options to help residents on the waterside who were experiencing flooding, the Leader would ask the Portfolio Holder to write to Cllr Rackham on his return.

Question 5

From Cllr David Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

With the Government's proposed planning reforms, does the Portfolio Holder agree that Members and Residents need to feel they are being listened to and not have planning decisions made for them by those without an understanding of our District? And will he make this point in the Council's response to the proposals?

Reply:

The Council's draft response to the consultation on proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework has been the subject of an all Member briefing on 3 September, before subsequently being considered in detail by Members of the Local Plan Members Working Group on 9 September and scrutinised at the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 12 September.

I am very grateful for the input of those Members able to feed into this process and I consider that our draft response, due by 24 September, has incorporated the concerns and suggestions of Members very well, and I thank Tim Guymer and his officer team for their hard work for producing such a detailed response in such a short space of time.

Alongside our response to the questions posed, I intend to prepare a letter to the Secretary of State seeking clarity on a number of wider related matters, including the Government's commitment to infrastructure investment in the New Forest, and whether the proposed planning reforms do enough to recognise the unique attributes and opportunities across the District, in areas such as economic growth and supporting and increasing natural capital.

Question 6

From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

With the need for developers to purchase credits to mitigate phosphates at a ridiculous cost (For example, the Land off, Moortown Lane, Ringwood (Application 21/11723) costed at circa 5 million for 443 houses). What is the Council doing to find better and more economical solutions that enable developers to spend less and therefore deliver more affordable housing?

Reply:

At present there is only one provider of credits for the Avon catchment (a decommissioned fish farm at Bicton, near Fordingbridge).

Currently, the Council is undertaking joint work for the Avon catchment with the Avon Working Group (this includes other authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, and Wessex Water). The Avon catchment is now in successful receipt of government funding (£9.8m) to deliver mitigation schemes.

A number of mitigation projects are being worked up to look to introduce new schemes to the open market, additional to the existing one at Bicton. It is anticipated that as further credit schemes are brought forward this will introduce competition into the market and hopefully lower costs.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the timeframes involved, the Portfolio Holder confirmed this was currently being looked at.

Question 7

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole

The Hants and IOW PCC recently announced £750k worth of funding for Community Wardens to assist in challenging a spike in ASB over the summer period, shared between local areas within the County and on the IOW. Can I ask why NFDC were one of the few areas not granted any portion of the allocated funds? And, did we actually engage with this initiative, and bid for any funding for this worthwhile project?

Reply:

In March of this year, the Council's Community Safety Team attended a briefing held by the OPCC where the eligibility criteria for accessing the funds were outlined. The eligibility criteria was defined by the Home Office as to what constituted an area hotspot, evidenced by Police using the Scanning Analysis Response Assessment or (SARA model for short). 20 locations across Hampshire were identified as eligible due to the high level of crime and ASB recorded, of which I am pleased to advise none were in the New Forest.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on pursuing possible funding, the Portfolio Holder highlighted £35,000 had been secured for community projects, which included:-

- NFDC District wide Weapons Prevention programme – £10,000.*
- Joint bid with Fawley Parish Council and NFDC, supported by Police and HIOWFRS (Fire Service) to deliver Drug and Alcohol awareness training district wide, and localised youth work on the waterside – £7,400.*
- Community and Social Housing bid of £17,100 for localised ASB issues to deliver targeted outreach work, Tidy Neighbourhood project, CCTV and specialist parenting support.*

Second Questions

Question 8

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Jeremy Heron

As councillors will have recently seen in the broadsheet newspapers, some movement is due on the old relative needs formula that was abandoned in 2013 towards Government local funding settlements. What contingencies therefore is the Council preparing if any, in anticipation of potential Government-led redistribution of funds, especially given the increasing likelihood that wealthier local authorities like ours may face reductions in funding to support more deprived areas elsewhere in the country. Moreover, what specific measures are being considered to maintain key public services, manage financial pressures and ensure long-term resilience in the face of such reforms?

Reply:

The Medium Term Financial Plan assumes that a fair funding review will take effect from 2027/28, and so everything we are doing in terms of making sensible decisions on things like benchmarking and adjusting our

Fees and Charges is gearing up for long term financial sustainability, on the basis that further funding reductions over time are likely. The Council also has a Budget Equalisation reserve, which is there to provide short-term financial assistance if any one particular finance settlement is more drastic in terms of funding reductions than our forecasts.

Interestingly this being a reserve that would have been spent multiple times over had the liberal democrat alternative budget been agreed for the last few years, removing the council's ultimate contingency for the event your question eludes to. Cllr Clark I'm sure will also have noted the investment that the administration proposes to make in council transformation on a spend-to-save basis over the next 3 years, creating more efficient and effective services for our residents, and maximising the potential from our assets, such as Appletree Court, through new and additional income generation.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Clark.