

Council – 13 October 2025
Questions Under Standing Order 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

What can be done to prevent NFDC refuse vehicles and other HGVs using Main Road, Dibden to access the A326 at Dibden Roundabout?

Reply

All of our crews are briefed, and their routes are monitored to ensure that they adhere to any weight restrictions in place in the district. In terms of the specific road being referred to, the limited number of NFDC vehicles using it are operating legally, in the same way as any other type of vehicle using the road as there are no restrictions in place.

Queries about imposing weight restrictions or otherwise, and the volume of traffic generally on a particular road are a matter for the County Council as highways authority

Note: This question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Osborne

Question 2

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies

I'm really pleased to see the Better Futures programme. It's really important we invest in supporting young people to develop skills they need to get on in life. However, It's not just skills. Housing is the number one priority for young people. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me what the Council are doing to get more housing for younger people across the New Forest?

Reply

I certainly agree that the Council's Economic Development team are delivering some great work for our residents. So too are our housing teams.

Significant legislative duties guide our approach to meeting housing needs, and that is one steeped in equality and opportunities for all. Those aged 35 and under, represent 37% of current housing register applicants.

In the last 12 months social housing lettings to those aged 35 and under match demand, with 37% of lettings going to this age demographic.

We are very much focused on additional housing delivery; providing a range of property types and sizes to meet a range of demand.

In the next 18 months 135 flats and houses will be delivered across the district by this council, and through our enabling and planning roles a further 422 units of registered provider housing will be delivered over the next 2 years.

However, it isn't just social rented where we are providing homes which benefit young people. The Council has now sold 13 units of Shared Ownership homes with 9 sales involving applicants under the age of 35. Shared Ownership is a fantastic form of housing supporting our residents, often with their first steps on the property ladder and we are currently committed to providing a further 51 units ourselves, alongside our partners who are delivering significantly more with 129 in the pipeline.

As more and more of the strategic sites, allocated in our Local Plan, come forward the more affordable housing will be delivered for the benefit of our residents.

Note: In response to a supplementary question recognising the local circumstances in Lymington and Pennington with new market homes being retirement flats and that new affordable homes from strategic sites were for the over 55s, and how this could be overcome in order to deliver housing for young people. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged this, and felt that the emerging Local Plan would need to lay down the foundations for what it wanted to achieve. It was highlighted that the Eastlands development in New Milton had been built specifically for those under the age of 35.

Question 3

From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

The residents of the Waterside are in an uproar over the failure of this council to deliver the black bin bags and recycling sacks. This is now months behind schedule. Why has the communication on this issue to local members, and more importantly the Public, on why this has happened, and when they will be finally delivered, been so poor? As this has made the situation much worse.

Reply

Sack deliveries for Phase 3 are continuing, with deliveries commencing in the Hythe area this week. Deliveries will thereafter continue in a southerly direction of travel to include Dibden Purlieu, Holbury, Blackfield, Fawley, Lepe, Langley, Calshot, Exbury, Beaulieu, and surrounding areas.

We have a main crew out and have been supplementing this with an additional crew when capacity allows. We also supplement this with streetscene capacity and agency staff when available.

We currently expect sack deliveries to be completed by mid to late December, with a necessary caveat however that if we need to deploy the resource working on sacks to deliver the statutory function and responsibility of waste collection, that will ultimately take operational priority. Evidently there have been times recently where this has been the case, and which is why sack deliveries are behind the usual schedule, and I'm sorry for any inconvenience this has caused. As highlighted in previous questions, many local authorities like us are experiencing disruption to waste services due to staff shortages and agency staff availability.

Residents who are already preparing for the future service, acquiring their own bin bags via retail or online outlets will of course be able to utilise the sacks when we deliver to them within their new wheeled containers. In the meantime, residents who are not in a position to wait to receive their sacks, can contact customer services with their address to arrange collection of additional sacks from an information office.

Waste and recycling updates are circulated to members weekly and may I refer you to the most recent one dated 10 October 2025, specifically regarding sacks. Information on all aspects of the waste service is

available for residents on the council website and supplemented via direct mailing.

In response to a supplementary question seeking the Portfolio Holder to personally commit to the residents in Phases 2 and 3 that they would not experience the same level of distribution as those in the first phase, the Portfolio Holder explained that the aim was to ensure that a first class service was provided. He could not however provide a such a commitment, as the roll out of the new service was complex and that it was difficult to predict matters such as staff shortages. It was normal for there to be some missed collections, breakdown of vehicles, hold up on the roads as this was the nature of the business. Officers were working very hard to provide an excellent service.

Question 4

From Cllr Philip Dowd to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

The Council recently backed option 1 unanimously for a Mid Hampshire Unitary that keeps the New Forest whole. What are the detailed financial, service-delivery, governance risks and contingency plans if central government rejects or modifies this proposal?

Reply

I addressed a very similar question at our last Council meeting, and I would refer you to that answer as it remains highly relevant.

I would further add that both the Council and Cabinet have endorsed a significant body of work that specifically outlines the risks associated with boundary changes, particularly in relation to service delivery and governance. These risks, and the potential implications of central government not adopting our preferred option, are the subject of ongoing dialogue with MHCLG. That engagement directly informs our scenario planning for all possible outcomes.

Our emerging LGR programme is designed to manage these risks and puts appropriate arrangements in place to keep resources, finances and emerging issues under review.

We recognise that the current lack of clarity around future groupings is in itself a key risk, and we are actively monitoring this and stepping up our planning accordingly. Our proportionate approach ensures that

contingency measures are in place to safeguard financial stability, maintain service continuity, and uphold strong governance arrangements, whatever the final decision may be.

Question 5

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

The Fawley Waterside “Venice of Britain” scheme was recently dropped due to viability concerns. What lessons has the Council learnt from that process, and how will it ensure future large developments are financially robust, environmentally sustainable, and aligned with local character?

Reply

The viability of a development scheme is the responsibility of the developer, so it is very important for a developer to do their own research before putting in a planning application to ensure the financial robustness of their scheme.

Fawley Waterside remains the most complex development site in the district in terms of delivery and constraints. Its scale, location, and environmental sensitivities mean that any future proposals will require careful consideration and detailed engagement.

I would remind Members that you are all invited to a dedicated briefing session on Tuesday, 21 October, where the developers will provide an update on progress and outline their intentions for the site. This will be an important opportunity to hear directly from them, ask questions, and understand the next steps.

The Council will continue to work closely with the developers to ensure that any proposals brought forward are deliverable, environmentally sustainable, and appropriate for the unique character of the New Forest.

In response to a supplementary question regarding future development and whether a purely commercial development would lead to a financial benefit to Fawley Parish and the wider Waterside area, the Portfolio Holder reported that he could not provide a full answer in the meeting, but would provide one thereafter in writing.

Question 6

From Cllr Phil Woods to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

High streets in the West of the New Forest are struggling, with established shops closing in Lyndhurst and many empty units in Fordingbridge. Residents suggest cheaper parking, cleaner street scenes, more frequent weeding and regular litter picking – and in many cases residents are doing these tasks on a voluntary basis. Can I ask what the Portfolio Holder what NFDC has done and will do next to help our vital high streets to survive?

Reply:

Thank you for this question which gives me opportunity to list the many initiatives that we are taking across the district. NFDC is actively supporting our high streets including Lyndhurst and Fordingbridge, through a range of initiatives:

- Economic Development team are working locally to provide tailored business support and build partnerships with Town and Parish Councils.*
- An Empty Shops Project is in development to help revitalise vacant units.*
- Up to £10,000 in Rural Prosperity funding per applicant (total fund £57,000) has been allocated, with an additional £20,000 via the New Forest National Park Authority for micro and small producers.*
- We're attending and supporting local networking events, including in Lyndhurst.*
- £200,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Fund is funding new programmes (25/26) including start-up and scale-up support, an Apprenticeship Hub, and digital support.*
- We co-sponsored the Hampshire Fare stand at the Speciality & Fine Food Fair in London which showcased 2 NF businesses in collaboration with TVBC and Winchester CC.*
- A sustainability project is being developed to support retail and hospitality businesses with cost-of-living challenges.*
- We promote digital marketing boot camps and are also sponsoring two business awards: one for micro businesses and one for young talent in food and drink.*
- A new Economic Development Strategy is being written and Skills Action Plan in progress.*

- *Our business newsletter, with over 3,000 subscribers, regularly highlights local businesses and developments.*
- *Over the past three years, NFDC's Economic Development service has invested £1.54 million into the local economy through infrastructure and business support.*

Other areas of the Council are also working to improve our high streets, including the work our streetscene team do day in and day out across our district keeping the district clean and tidy. There are also the four days of free parking that have been offered in our towns before Christmas, starting on Small Business Saturday on the 6th December.

I hope Members will agree that this clearly demonstrates our ongoing commitment to supporting and revitalising our high streets.

In response to a supplementary question, asking the Portfolio Holder to support a trial of the first hour free of parking in Fordingbridge, as a special case to support high street recovery, the Portfolio Holder responded acknowledging the debate earlier in the meeting on the matter of one hour free car parking and therefore had nothing more to add.

Question 7

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Please can you advise the estimated cost of one-hour free parking in NFDC car parks not on sea fronts and in proximity to a high street, for the period from November 1st to February 28th?

Reply

The estimated loss in 1 hour ticket sales would be approximately £120,000 per annum. However, what this doesn't do is take into account customers who currently pay for more than 1 hour, and potentially therefore spend more time in the high streets.

In response to a supplementary question, asking that an hour of free car parking be considered, in particular for the winter months for the next year, in addition to the free parking days and that the financial information be available when setting in the budget for 2026/27, the Portfolio Holder responded noting that the comments would be considered when setting the budget for next year.

Question 8

From Cllr Sean Cullen to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

Can I ask you as Leader of NFDC write to NJORD Partners, the organisation who have recently taken over Red Funnel, and therefore ownership of Hythe Ferry, and ask them for clarity on their plans for Hythe Ferry, and urge them to expedite any works on the pontoon to get this valued and strategically important mode of transport back up and running?

Reply

Thank you for raising this matter, I am aware of the keen interest in the Hythe Ferry from the many previous times it has been raised in this Chamber.

I am very happy to write to NJORD Partners, the new owners of Red Funnel and therefore the Hythe Ferry, to request clarity on their plans for the Hythe Ferry service. I am keen from a transparency perspective, for our residents, to get a clear timetable for any works required on the pontoon, as they fall to the owners to fund.

I hope that the new owners will be quick to take the steps they need to; to bring the Hythe Ferry back into operation so it can play a part in the district's transport network and help support local connectivity.

Question 9

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

The majority of our population lives along the Waterside, yet there is still no overarching flood plan or coastal plan for the Waterside. When can we expect one?

Reply

Another return outing for this topic, and understand this is important to you and the residents.

At risk of sounding like a broken record it is the Environment Agency who are responsible for this work, not New Forest District Council.

The Environment Agency has confirmed that a Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for the Lymington to Redbridge coastal frontage, which includes much of the Waterside, is listed in their forward programme of works.

This has a provisional start date of 2027/28 with an estimated delivery period thereafter of 5 years. The strategy is expected to be combined with the plan for the eastern side of Southampton Water, creating a more integrated approach to coastal risk management across the region.

With regard to funding, I would stress that the strategy is not yet funded, the estimated cost is £5 million, and again that is for the Environment Agency to resolve.

This was discussed in detail at the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19 June 2025, where an EA officer presented the current position. The minutes and recording remain available to you and any other interested members.

In response to a supplementary question regarding how the District Council would ensure that any risk of flooding in the Waterside area would be mitigated against, recognising that there were expected to be large infrastructure projects in the area, the Portfolio Holder explained when the strategy is published, the district council would be fully engaged. It was further highlighted that flooding was in the remit of the Environment Agency.