

**COUNCIL – 29 JANUARY 2020**

**MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Questions to Portfolio Holders**

(A) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

“How many homes/flats have been built in Stevenage that did not require planning permission i.e. under the government's legislation allowing office conversions?”

*Answer:*

*Using the Smart Herts database, between 01 April 2013 and 31 March 2019 there were 489 completions flats with a further 39 permitted new flats still to be completed.*

(B) Question from Councillor Robin Parker, CC

“What assistance is being offered to the developer in filling the empty new retail units in Park Place?”

*Answer:*

*The Council is eager to see the retail units occupied on the ground floor of Park Place. The development is of course a private scheme, and it is the responsibility of the developer to ensure that the spaces are let, with the Council not privy to the commercial negotiations between the owner and prospective tenants. Notwithstanding this, the Council has been proactive in supporting the developer as far as possible. This includes: Including a range of planning uses in the original planning permission to allow flexibility for commercial opportunities, meeting with the developer to discuss different types of uses possible outside of the current uses, sharing intelligence about prospective tenants that may be suitable for Park Place and passing on commercial contacts where appropriate, and promoting Park Place in marketing material alongside other town centre developments. This is of course in the context of the national challenges facing retail and High Streets that have been well documented, and the work the Council and its partners have done to secure government funding, develop a regeneration programme which is now embedded in the Local Plan, and bring forward significant development schemes, including the work with Reef, Mace and the public realm improvements which will all support the transformation of the town centre and encourage new opportunities.*

(C) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

“Which members of the Executive have personally tested the use of the new proposed recycling bags before recommending them to be rolled out across Stevenage?”

*Answer:*

*Recycling bags have been tested with our residents rather than elected Members.*

*During September 2018 – January 2019 270 households (in Manor and Symonds Green wards) were invited to participate in a pilot to test 60lt recycling bags against the existing blue and black boxes. Over 80% of households participated in the pilot. Officers subsequently sought feedback from the households in the pilot area. Around 40% of households responded. One of the key findings of this survey was that 54% of respondents preferred the bags to the boxes, with 12% having no strong opinion.*

*Residents provided feedback which has been built into the specification for the bags now ordered. The weight sewn into the base of the bag has been increased, and additional fastenings have been added to enable the lids to be fixed down more securely in order to keep water out and to prevent contents escaping in windy weather.*

(D) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

“How are you ensuring that the SG1 plans submitted by MACE are environmentally friendly?”

*Answer:*

*Now that the planning application for SG1 has been submitted and validated, the proposals must be considered on their merits against National Planning Policy and the Council’s Local Plan, including any environmental criteria. Given this application will be considered by Planning Committee in due course, there are limits to what the Council can comment on in detail at this time. However, I would remind the Member that the materials issued through the public consultation included proposals to include an all-electric energy strategy reflecting decarbonisation of the grid, the inclusion of Photovoltaic panels included in the first phase, high quality public realm including green roofs, and access to a range of sustainable transport options. Ultimately it is for the planning process to consider the proposals, but the submission of the application is a significant milestone for the Town Centre.*

(E) Question from Councillor Jody Hanafin

“In support of our council's aim to become carbon neutral, will SBC follow the excellent examples set by Cambridge and Goldsmiths Universities and pledge to end the provision of red meat in catering at council and civic events?”

*Answer:*

*As Members are aware the Council is putting together a Climate Change Strategy, to be considered by the Executive next month and we will be establishing our Citizen's Panel reflecting our cooperative ethos. It is in these forums that individual interventions should be raised for potential inclusion within the climate change action plan that will be developed alongside the strategy.*

(F) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell

“What is the Council doing to discourage the blight of fly-tipping?”

*Answer:*

*The Hertfordshire Fly Tipping Group, a sub group of Waste Aware, is a multi-agency taskforce including the Boroughs, Districts and County Council as well as the Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Herts Fire & Rescue, the Environment Agency, the National Farmers Union and Keep Britain Tidy which have come together to improve how Hertfordshire responds to fly tipping. Stevenage Borough Council is a member of this group. In 2019 the group delivered a high profile project to raise awareness of fly-tipping and providing advice to residents and businesses about their responsibility in terms of disposing of their waste.*

*We have information and guidance on our web pages, about what constitutes fly-tipping, what people can do to protect themselves, and where they can legitimately dispose of waste, plus there is a link to the SCRAP Fly-tipping leaflet. There have been social media postings to raise awareness, and we provide leaflets and information at events. In addition, the Environmental Policy & Development team have developed a leaflet to advise businesses specifically on their responsibilities. This leaflet has been provided to the Town Centre Manager and the Business Relationship Manager for distribution at their respective upcoming networking events.*

*The Community Safety Team investigate reports of fly tipping in the town, enforcement action is taken against individuals that fly tip, this includes the use of Fixed Penalty Notices, Community Protection Notices and Warning, recharges to remove the tip and enforcement action against tenancies.*

*SBC are part of a pilot that uses the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA), the pilot scheme was introduced through the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to support landowners who have been victims of fly-tipping on their private land. The pilot follows a light-touch process, in asking district and borough councils to expand their existing service to include fly-tipping on specific types of private*

*land and to subsequently pass the cost of this clearance onto the PCC. This work is supported by Hertfordshire's Fly Tipping Group, and is in line with their work programme, helping to improve knowledge in relation to fly tipping on private land, including the number and types of incidents occurring and typical clear up costs.*

(G) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley

“When will the Council introduce a paperless system for Council meetings, to reduce the amount of unnecessary paper consumed, thus contributing to the reduction in carbon?”

*Answer:*

*The council already has the Modern.Gov system which can provide committee papers electronically. There are proposals in development to supply councillors with a mobile device to access this system which. Subject to further consideration and sign off it may be possible for the devices to be distributed post the elections in May.*