

Public Document Pack



COUNCIL

14 OCTOBER 2020

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART I

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Answer to the submitted Question is attached.

Pages 3 - 4

11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Answers to the 3 submitted Questions are attached.

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions to Portfolio Holders

(A) Question from Jill Borchers

Recently work has started on the new bus interchange as part of the regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. As a result, a key cycleway route through the Town Centre has been completely blocked. There is no signage indicating this nor a diversion provided.

Access to the Town Centre is already very restricted - a local company report: "At Box Bike Delivery we find access to the town centre to make deliveries restrictive, difficult and, given the relatively small-size and proximity of the area, surprisingly time-consuming. As the resident population of the town centre grows and with more deliveries needing to be made, we would welcome any improvements to access for cyclists, including our cargo bikes, that could help the last-mile become a greener one.'

Stevenage Borough Council have declared a Climate Emergency and continue to promote the cycleway network yet appear to have paid no attention to maintaining a crucial cycle access route during extended building works. Why was this allowed to happen given your stated commitments to active travel?

Answer (Cllr John Gardner):

Work recently began on Phase 1 of the construction of the new bus interchange, including enabling groundworks and utilities services that run down the length of Old London Road. In order to maintain public safety at all times, which must be our top priority, there will at times be some disruption for pedestrians and cyclists. This included a temporary closure of the cycle route. Officers have now worked with the contractors to ensure that the diversion route is adequately signed.

We appreciate that the solution is not ideal, but it was necessary on this occasion, as safety of the public has to be main priority around construction sites. The completed bus interchange and other development sites around the town centre will deliver significant benefits to cyclists and pedestrians, but some short-term disruption is unavoidable, as would be expected of any roadworks scheme, for example. Officers will work with contractors to minimise the impacts of construction as much as possible, and will aim to provide diversion routes where closures of routes is unavoidable.

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MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions to Portfolio Holders

(A) Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence

“Do you believe the Council communicates effectively with the local and regional press?”

Answer (Cllr Sharon Taylor):

“Yes, the Council does communicate effectively in numerous ways with the local and regional media. During the lockdown period, local, regional and national media turned to Stevenage Borough Council to capture our work as exemplar examples of keeping the local community informed and people of Stevenage cared for during the height of the pandemic. Our work to regenerate Stevenage town centre and our award-winning Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse are frequently in the media, too - local, regional, national, broadcast and trade press. Yet again, we are punching above our weight and leading the way in Hertfordshire and the East of England.”

(B) Question from Councillor Doug Bainbridge

“Will SBC commit to revisiting the Local plan in light of the official adjusted projected growth figures and requirements for housing?”

Answer (Cllr John Gardner):

“The Government recently proposed an update to how the Objectively Assessed Housing Need is calculated. The new method incorporates housing stock into the baseline (as well as household projections) to help achieve a ‘fair share’ approach; it’s claimed that this will help boost numbers in areas with low projections. It also puts a greater emphasis on the uplift for affordability and removes the cap which exists under the current approach, stating it is ‘not compatible’ with the aim of boosting housing supply quickly. These changes mean a new national total of 337,000 homes a year – far higher than the 270,000 under the current approach.

Although the new proposed methodology aims to increase housing delivery in some areas, the new calculation actually brings down the figure in Stevenage from 444 to 322. While this may seem like a reason to review the Local Plan, the current situation is not that straight forward. The Government are currently consulting on the proposed ‘Planning for the future’ reforms to the planning system to streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed.

The white paper makes a number of proposed changes to the planning system, which could potentially see the Council required to zone all land within Stevenage for its development potential. At this stage the new planning proposals and housing numbers have not been adopted by the Government and are only high level proposals. It is far too premature to commit to an early review of the Local Plan when we don't understand what the local planning requirements on Stevenage will be. Given our Plan was only adopted last year, the Council is committed to reviewing the Plan by 2024 to ensure it reflect the relevant policies.

To ensure we are permitting the type of housing that is need for all residents and to create mixed and balanced communities, it is vital we ensure an adequate range of tenures and housing types not just one and two bed apartments.

When the new proposals are clarified we will report back to Members with our response and approach to the changes.”

(C) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

“Were Longmeadow Ward Councillors kept fully updated of the discussions and decisions for allowing Broadwater Day 2020 to go ahead?”

Answer (Cllr Rob Broom):

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the Council's decision to cancel its own events programme, including Stevenage Day, the organisers of Broadwater Day were advised that the Council would not be organising or supporting large-scale community events during the summer period.

In spite of this advice, it became clear that the organisers were still planning to proceed with the event without consent. The Hertfordshire Director of Public Health was notified in accordance with the health protection (coronavirus restrictions) regulations. All relevant ward councillors, including Longmeadow councillors, were notified of this via e-mail on 27 August 2020, providing a clear outline of the issues presented, updated on 28 August 2020, and updated finally on 4 September 2020, outlining the Public Health decision around infection control following further rationalisation and mitigation measures for the proposed event.