

Question for Full Council Monday 18th July, 2016

Question 1

Question to Cllr Alan Bottwood from Brian Calder, On behalf of #NoMoInNoHo Campaign in Northampton for No Monster Incinerator

Concentrations of NO₂ in air quality monitoring areas across Northampton including St James have exceeded legal limits consistently over a period of in excess of 10 years. Will councillor Bottwood immediately release the councils air quality action plan for public consultation prior to the council progressing its Northampton Local Plan and prior to the council considering as a consultee any plans for a waste incineration plant or gasifier in St James which will only exacerbate air quality problems within the town?

Response

The low emission strategy will be released for public consultation within the next 2 weeks to seek views of local Northampton people and its businesses.

The gasifier proposed for St James will be subject to an independent assessment required as part of the planning process which is being administered by Northamptonshire County Council.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 2

Question to Cllr Alan Bottwood from Brian Calder, On behalf of #NoMoInNoHo Campaign in Northampton for No Monster Incinerator

Will councillor Bottwood publish the air quality management figures in total for the period 2005 – 2016 indicating which air quality monitoring areas have exceeded legal limits and explain what actions the council have taken to date to reduce these illegal levels of emissions?

Response

Data on air quality monitoring across Northampton will be made available on the Council's website. Where the Council has a recognised issue with air quality these locations have been declared as air quality management areas. This includes locations such as Victoria Promenade, St James area (immediately around the junctions of Harlestone Road, Weedon Road and Spencer Bridge Road) and Harborough Road. These locations are subject to annual monitoring. The results from this monitoring will be made available on the Council's website.

To address emissions the Council has developed a draft low emission strategy which will be going out for public consultation in the near future. This approach integrates the actions to deal with emissions in the coordinated manner through planning and transportation rather than taking isolated actions which risk displacing problems to other locations.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 3

Question to Cllr Jonathan Nunn from Cllr Samuel Shaw

Cleanliness

The summer holidays are about to start and the town centre is going to be even busier than normal.

Question: Can you tell me what is being done to make sure it remains clean and that litter is dealt with throughout the summer?

Response

We have three enforcement officers and have up to 1 July 2016 served a total of 669 Fixed Penalty Notices. I am confident that we have an active, hardworking and efficient team that will look after our town centre to the best of their abilities.

Additionally, we have also recently purchased a Suction Sweeper - a big green street cleaning machine. This device is excellent at removing cigarette buds and ideal for areas such as sidewalks, stations, cycle lanes, pedestrian areas, parking etc.

This Council recognises the great importance of maintaining a visible presence in town centre, therefore, for the first time in a very long time, we have a team of four operating the machine 7 days a week.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Town Centre & Sports Clubs

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Question 4

Question to Cllr Alan Bottwood from Cllr Tony Ansell

Northampton in Bloom

We heard that the Britain in Bloom judges came to Northampton and we have all seen floral displays in town.

Question: Can you explain, reassure us that Northampton in Bloom has the impact on the whole town and not just the town centre?

Response

The town centre is of course important. It attracts shoppers, working people, families, visitors, businesses, investors, people with economic prosperity and, therefore, it is our showcase. However, Bloom is about far more than only the town centre, as it encourages schools, community groups, residents and businesses across Northampton to get involved in horticulture and community projects.

Participants in the project represent most of our town, from Duston, Far Cotton, Hunsbury, Eastern District, to Abington, Kingsthorpe etc. All in all, the Town centre is just a part of the bloom experience. Northampton in Bloom truly is an event where our whole town and community come together to keep the area look welcoming.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 5

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr Andrew Kilbride

Greyfriars

Question: Can you reassure us that the schemes put forward by developers of the Greyfriars, which you announced this morning, represent the very best for the future of Northampton?

Response

The proposals that have been put forward came from very experienced commercial developers. The two bids are mix-use schemes, including residential, commercial, daytime and evening uses, retails etc. They are both of a very high quality and will no doubt help attract people to that part of the town.

The plans for the site include a coach facility and vitally both potential developers have been in contact with Legal and General about linkages through the Grosvenor Centre to the Greyfriars.

I am confident we have two excellent schemes and whichever is selected in September will be a great asset to not only the town centre but Northampton as a whole.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration Enterprise & Planning

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Question 6

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr James Hill

St Giles Street

We've seen that the works in St Giles Street have been underway for months now and all members would have witnessed the disruption if they come to the car park. With the first phase completed and second phase started, there is still some time to go before this work is finished.

Question: Can you update us on whether and how businesses and public are being kept informed about what is going on?

Response

I am pleased to say that the works are moving ahead very quickly.

The workmen are being extremely considerate and helpful to businesses to make sure they can get deliveries and other access to their premises.

We have regular fortnightly meetings with the steering group of St Giles St businesses and we have started visited businesses not just in St Giles St but wider area, including Dergate, Castilian Street etc. in order to pick up quickly on any potential problems and put them right at the earliest possible stage.

We know how important St Giles St is to the economy of the Town centre and Cultural Quarter, that is why we worked hard to become the Best British High Street and we are now trying to improve it even further.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 7

Question to Cllr Alan Bottwood from Mr S Miller

Following the result of the EU Referendum, could the councillor please confirm that the public consultation on the Low Emissions Strategy will go ahead as planned, and would he be able to confirm when this consultation is expected to begin.

Response

The public consultation on the NLES will go ahead as planned, and is anticipated to commence within the next 2 weeks.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 8

Question to Cllr Anna King from Cllr Jane Birch

In relation to the Town Show, popular with residents, the Racecourse was used by commercial organisation. What income does that bring into this Council?

Response

As this was the first year for this event and was free entry to the general public the council did not charge a fee on this occasion.

Councillor Anna King
Cabinet Member for Community Safety

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Question 9

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr Arthur McCutcheon

Does the Borough own land that we can produce a master plan for and then offer small plots for housing on to small developers?

Response

Thank you for your question. It may be helpful if I set out how these things are required to be considered.

The **Housing & Planning Act 2016** confers a duty on local planning authorities to ‘...give suitable development permission in respect of enough serviced plots of land to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding in the authority’s area...’

This type of housebuilding, perhaps never likely to be the main source of new housing, can still make a contribution to local housing supply.

Note

Serviced plot of Land is defined in the Act as:

(a) Land that has access to a public highway and has connections for electricity, water and wastewater; or

(b) Land that can be provided with those things in specific circumstances or within a specified period.

The **Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015** says that evidence of demand for such house-building will be provided via a register of individuals and associations of individuals who are seeking to acquire serviced plots of land in the authority’s area in order to build houses for those individuals to occupy as homes.

The Council’s website already enables people interested in this form of development to register their interest via the submission of an on-line pro-forma (at the time of writing only four people have done this).

A **DCLG Technical Consultation**, dated February 2016 suggests that a published list of small sites would make it easier for developers and individuals interested in this form of housebuilding to identify suitable sites for development and it would seem that something along the lines of a small sites register may be envisaged. At this point we await further guidance in the matter as the form of any such register may be prescribed by the Secretary of State.

So the approach being taken by Government is one that seeks to secure suitable land for self-build and custom housebuilding irrespective of ownership, largely through the operation of the planning system. This would seem to be an appropriate approach especially given the level of registered interest at the moment.

The Council, which in its capacity as property owner/manager has a duty to secure best value, will continue to be mindful of the needs of self-build and custom housebuilders if it is considering the possible disposal of land for housing.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration Enterprise & Planning

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Question 10

Question to Cllr Mary Markham from Cllr Danielle Stone

Do we receive any European funding. If so what for? How will Brexit impact?

Response

The Council currently does not have any European Union funding.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 11

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr Arthur McCutcheon

Do we have a problem in the borough with land banking?

Response

As land banking, where builders buy land in advance of actually wanting to build on it, or in the expectation that prices may rise in the future, is a commercial decision, the Borough Council is not able to say definitively whether there are a large number of 'banked' sites.

However, the Planning and Regeneration teams do take a very proactive approach towards bringing forward housing and regeneration schemes, working closely with land owners and developers to ensure that suitable schemes are approved and then delivered on site as quickly as possible. Unimplemented planning permissions are also regularly monitored.

Through the Core Strategy and local plan process, land owners are encouraged to identify sites with development potential, which are then assessed and, where appropriate, highlighted as future development sites.

The Borough Council has also recently participated in a pilot scheme to produce a register of brownfield land which will provide house builders with up-to-date and publicly available information on all brownfield sites available for housing locally. The register will help housebuilders identify suitable sites quickly, speeding up the construction of new homes.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration Enterprise & Planning

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Question 12

Question Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Rufia Ashraf

Rising homeless -do we have the ability to build affordable and social housing?

Response

Although the Council received 9% fewer homelessness applications in 2015/16 than in 2014/15, it accepted a housing duty towards 11% more homeless households in 2015/16 than it accepted in 2014/15. This increase is consistent with what is happening elsewhere in the country and across most of Northamptonshire.

Yes, the Council does have the ability to build affordable and social housing and this is an area we are actively seeking to develop with NPH. Housing associations are also continuing to build new affordable housing in Northampton.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 13

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr Arthur McCutcheon

In an era of growth how are we to match homes to work force need?

Response

In planning for strategic growth and development, the provision of new homes takes account of several factors which assist in matching housing supply to need. These factors include:

- An assessment of the overall quantity of new homes to be provided and an assessment of the types of housing that will be needed. The West Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment and related Technical Papers assessed housing requirements including the overall amount and type of housing required. The Northamptonshire Strategic Employment Land Assessment and related Technical Papers assessed the requirement in terms of jobs growth for the area including the economic prospects for the area and labour force growth projections. The population, household and labour force growth projections informed the number of new homes to be provided in Northampton as set out in the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan Part 1 (2014).
- Consideration of price and affordability, for both market housing and affordable housing. Whilst the planning system cannot typically regulate sale prices, the plan-led system requires local planning authorities to identify enough land to meet the broadly identified housing needs. An up-to-date development plan can therefore contribute to the overall availability of land and provides a degree of certainty which reduces the degree of risk for new development. The amount and mix of affordable housing that is provided by new development can also be considered, subject to viability.
- Location of new homes & jobs: this can affect commuting levels, commuting patterns and access to employment. The planning system cannot control where people work compared with where they live but the plan-led system can provide greater choice of jobs and/ or means of travel to work.

Consideration of the above factors helps to ensure that a balanced supply of housing is provided reflecting the identified local needs.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration Enterprise & Planning

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Question 14

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Rufia Ashraf

To prevent homelessness we need to end short hold tenancies. How are we going to do that?

Response

I am sorry, but I do not understand your question.

Are you saying that the Council should take positive action to bring assured shorthold tenancies to an end, or are you saying that the Council should stop assured shorthold tenancies being used in Northampton?

If the Council takes positive action to encourage landlords to bring assured shorthold tenancies to an end, this would actually cause (rather than prevent) homelessness.

Assured shorthold tenancies have been in existence for almost thirty years, since the enactment of the Housing Act 1988. As this is national legislation, the Council is not able to stop assured shorthold tenancies being used in Northampton.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 15

Question to Cllr Brandon Eldred from Cllr Elizabeth Gowen

Are we going to sign the municipal bond framework?

Response

The current capital investment plan and borrowing position for the Council does not require additional financing at this point in time over and above that already approved. However, if the borrowing needs of the council change then consideration will be given to other financing vehicles, including the Municipal Bond framework.

Councillor Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Finance

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Question 16

Question to Cllr Mary Markham from Cllr Danielle Stone

Please can we have an update on the progress towards a Dementia Friendly Town?

Response

We have joined the national and local Dementia Action Alliance groups and have developed three actions which are currently being worked on. These are:-

- To deliver dementia awareness training to all customer facing staff and encourage them to register as Dementia Friends
- Engaging with town centre retailers to encourage them to become dementia friendly
- Considering those living with Dementia when planning new projects and in the renewal and re-design of current environments (where NBC have control over those) Examples would include lighting, signage and design and placement of seating etc.

An officer steering group has been formed and they arranged activities which were undertaken during Dementia Awareness Week in May. Further involvement and activities are being planned for World Alzheimers week during September.

The steering group are working closely with the Alzheimers Society and developing a training programme for all staff and for local businesses who have indicated an interest.

We are also actively reviewing how the Guildhall and other council buildings could become more dementia friendly which includes designing signage to meet the needs of people living with Dementia.

We are now active members of the Northamptonshire Dementia Action Alliance which will enable us to influence and be involved in what is happening locally to further develop the action plan towards becoming a Dementia Friendly Town.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 17

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Rufia Ashraf

Can we have an update on progress in setting up a Social Lettings Agency?

Response

Although it was hoped that the Social Lettings Agency would have been up and running by now, Officers in the Housing & Wellbeing Service have needed to spend a lot of their time on other priorities, including the development of fresh and more innovative approaches to rough sleeping, HMOs and housing enforcement.

The Head of Housing & Wellbeing and I have agreed that, in order to set up the Social Lettings Agency as soon as practicable, we need to secure the services of an additional member of staff who has the skills, experience and capacity to get things done and, guided by the Head of Housing & Wellbeing, put everything in place in readiness for the recruitment of a team that will run the Social Lettings Agency.

Although I am disappointed by the time it is taking to set up this important initiative, I am confident that the extra resources will help the team make good progress over the coming months. I am happy, of course, to meet with you and the Head of Housing & Wellbeing to brief you on what has already been done, and what still needs to be done, to establish a viable and effective lettings agency in the town.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 18

Question to Cllr Jonathan Nunn from Cllr Anamul Haque

There is a growing conflict of interest between inner town centre residents and businesses that offer services through the night. What are we going to do about it?

Response

I am not aware of specific evidence of growing conflict of interest between residents and businesses. If residents are experiencing problems with particular businesses they should contact the Environmental Health and Licensing team who have powers to take enforcement action to deal with specific problems.

The Police monitor the night-time economy and flag any emerging or concerning issues with NBC through established partnership meetings. Should a response be required, a partnership approach is adopted.

Additionally, we are also in the process of setting up a Night Time Economy Strategy with which we would like to meet the vision of a safe town and attractive town centre with a diverse night time economy, accessible to all.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Town Centre & Sports Clubs