

FULL COUNCIL

Tuesday, 12 December 2023 at 7.30 pm

AGENDA SUPPLEMENT

The following papers have been added to the agenda of the above meeting. They were not available when the Agenda was originally published.

13. **Questions to the Leader, Lead Members, Chairs of Committees, and reports from the Chairs of the Committees, and questions on the Chairs' reports** (Pages 3 - 26)

- Questions to Lead Members and Written Answers

General Enquiries: Please contact the Committee Team at
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QUESTIONS TO LEAD MEMBERS 12 December 2023

1. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

With the risk of extreme weather, whether floods or excessive heat, that can become an emergency, please can you confirm that the Hertfordshire has a suitable emergency process, which I am not convinced it does, or at least the partnership can work towards something similar to the Sussex Warning group, which I will send by email to you.

Written response:

There is an Emergency Planning process co-ordinated by the Planning Group of Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum.
In addition, locally in Three Rivers:

- Last year we created a Wildfire Prevention Group which was in full swing this summer in preventing fires. If there is a fire this is business as usual for the fire service.
- For excessive heat and cold Housing have a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) response which is included in our new risk register.
- For pluvial flooding Herts Highways take the lead with the emergency services in support

Residents can sign up to the met office weather alerts via a link on our website and further information on flooding is available on our website.

2. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Narinder Sian

The current livestreaming arrangements leave many at a disadvantage and undermine the council's attempt to foster transparency and accessibility in decision-making processes. During the October full council meeting only 12 of the councillors present were visible. None of the Green groups' councillors can be seen on the live stream. Could the council take steps to resolve this.

Written response:

Members will be aware that the option for 'follow me' cameras was offered when the specification for live streaming was being developed. However, Members voted in favour of adopting a fixed camera system when this was discussed at the Policy & Resources Committee Meeting on 19 July 2021. Unfortunately, in use the fixed camera system has some limitations. For the majority of smaller Committee Meetings, the fixed camera set up is entirely sufficient with all Members in attendance remaining within the frame of the camera. However, during larger meetings, like Full & Annual Council, the extent of the zoom on the fixed cameras limits the field of vision. The room layout has been adjusted to mitigate this issue, although it is accepted that the issue cannot be entirely resolved with changes to the room layout.

There is the option to control the 4 fixed cameras manually via the tablet during the meeting, giving greater flexibility in the view offered to those viewing online, however, this lack of automation results in a lag while the cameras refocus, meaning the discussion has often moved on before the cameras have focused on the speaker. It

should be noted that the manual manipulation of the camera angles requires dedicated extra resource and cost at meetings.

We could look at re-arranging the seating however to give better coverage.

3. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Reena Ranger

What is Three Rivers District Council doing to investigate the allegations of bullying at Rickmansworth Waste and Recycling Depot?

Written response:

Members will be aware of recent public reporting by My News of allegations made, by an ex-employee, regarding alleged behaviours and practice at the Councils Depot. It is understandable that reading such allegations may cause concern and raise questions. Members should be assured that all of the allegations have been fully reviewed and investigated, as would be the case for any complaints received about the behaviours and actions of our staff. Given the severity of the allegations this has been undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team.

Some of the allegations refer to historic issues, some dating back almost a decade, that were properly reported, investigated and dealt with at the time resulting in individuals exiting the organisation. Remaining allegations have been shown to be entirely unsubstantiated with either no evidence to support them or, in a significant number of cases, evidence available to show them as being simply untrue.

Officers and managers at the depot have been understandably upset by the misrepresentation of both themselves as individuals and the working environment there. Support is being provided by the Associate Director for Customer and Community and despite this incident the working atmosphere at the Depot remains positive. The most recent Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) saw the depot staff reporting high satisfaction in their roles (average 8.7/10) and high levels of motivation for the year ahead (Average 8/10)

I hope this provides reassurance to Members with regards to the Depot and the teams based there.

4. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

In the last eleven months, two by-elections have been called in Chorleywood South due to the resignation of two Liberal Democrat Parish Councillors and a Liberal Democrat District Councillor (who was also Chair of this Council). What does the Leader of this Council think is causing this exodus?'

Written Response:

As former Councillor Phil Williams made clear he has stood down for personal and family reasons and I will not comment further.

5. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Philip Hearn

In November 2023, a Liberal Democrat leaflet in Chorleywood South & Maple Cross included an attack on a young person running as a Councillor for the first time. The lines of attack included the candidate a) wanting to run in both the District and Parish elections when both incumbent Liberal Democrat councillors already have both roles, and the Liberal Democrat district council candidate is already a parish councillor and b) not living in the ward when neither of the two incumbent Liberal Democrat Councillors live in the ward! Will the Leader of this Council condemn these personal and hypocritical attacks and reflect on how these comments are likely to lead to fewer people of all ages wanting to enter politics.

Written Response:

I have seen the said leaflet. It makes no reference to anyone's age nor should it. The information in it is factually correct.

6. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Philip Hearn

In November 2023, a Liberal Democrat leaflet in Chorleywood South & Maple Cross claims that part of the Lib Dem candidate's plan is to 'clean up our rivers' with a picture of local Liberal Democrats standing by a river. Apart from a Liberal Democrat councillor resigning after building an unauthorised chicken farm in Latimer (which Buckinghamshire Council said has the potential to cause ammonia pollution to the River Chess), what else does this plan consist of?

Written Response:

The Lib Dem Councillors past and present have been very active in chasing up for action to prevent river pollution.

This includes dealing with the repeated run-offs in the River Colne from HS2 and more recently a diesel spill into the stream that leads into the Maple Lodge Nature Reserve to which Lib Dem Councillors had the Environment Agency and Three Rivers Officers attended resulting in a boom being erected to prevent further contamination.

This was on top of 121 hours of sewage entering the river from the Thames Water facility.

Last year Thames Water agreed a 50% increase in waste water from HS2 in our rivers. It's to be regretted that the Conservative councillors do not think this is either important or something they do not care about, and that their government is letting the private water companies off the hook all the time with this and it's affecting all our residents and rivers.

The Council are involved in multiple catchment scale projects taking place in the local area which aim to protect and enhance the rivers. Officers are working to assist these projects and ensure that TRDC plays an active role in the protection, management,

and enhancement of the river system, including the globally rare chalk streams that flow through the district. Examples of these river-based projects include river restoration at the Bury Grounds, involvement with the Smarter Water Catchment project along the River Chess, involvement with the Colne Catchment Action Network (Colne CAN) and elements of the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management plan which involve river enhancements.

7. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

What does it say about the leadership of the Lib Dem group when the Chair of this Council resigned both this and the District Councillor roles whilst staying on as a County Councillor?

Written Response:

As per answer to question 4, no further comment.

8. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Why does the Leader of Three Rivers District Council think that the former Chair of this Council resigned as a District Councillor two days before the date beyond which no by-election would have been required?

Written Response:

As per answer to question 4, no further comment.

9. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Philip Hearn

Only 40 out of the over 1000 people who accessed the 'Have Your Say' platform for the 'Three Rivers Community Strategy' survey completed it. I personally found the 'Local Plan' survey on the platform very hard to use. Does the Leader of the Council share my concerns that the complexity in using the 'Have Your Say' platform may have put people off responding to the latest Local Plan Consultation?

Written Response:

No, I do not. The 'Have Your Say' consultation tool is a widely used platform by many councils across the country including our neighbours. Introduced earlier this year at Three Rivers the platform provides an efficient and consistent way for the council to consult the community on key topics. Once people have signed up the platform is actually very simple and clear to use. The use of this platform provides greater consistency and accuracy of consultation data allowing comparisons year to year and improved qualitative data.

10. Question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sarah Nelmes, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Now that Three Rivers District Council has adopted Civica's Modern.gov online platform, all principal authorities in Hertfordshire use it. However, Three Rivers District Council is the only principal authority in Hertfordshire to have disabled the

built-in “Search documents” function. It has also disabled the “Forward plan” function and barely uploads any decisions to its “Decisions” page. Why has the Three Rivers District Council opted to make it harder to find official documents about past and future policy decisions?

Written response:

A number of Issue Manager’s functions in Modern.Gov are primarily aimed at local authorities which operate a Leader and Executive model of governance, which requires the publication of a Forward Plan giving notice of all key decisions due to be taken with the next 28 days. The Committee Team recognise that Issue Manager is not currently being used to its full potential and now that the Team is fully staffed, work is underway to identify those areas which can be developed further and implemented to improve the openness and transparency of the Council’s decision making processes.

11. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Sarah Nelmes

Given a recent Conservative leaflet that has been issued that says they raised concerns about the expansion of Warner Brothers, Leavesden Studios, can the lead member confirm what actually occurred when the plans were considered and if the development causes harm has been stated by the Conservatives and what had been done to offset any harm?

Written response:

At the Planning Committee meeting in December 2022, Members resolved to grant planning permission 22/0491/FUL for the expansion of WBSL, including 11 new Sound Stages with the voting being 9 For, 0 Against and 1 Abstention. This decision was fully supported by the Secretary of State. Whilst the development constituted inappropriate development within the Green Belt, it was considered that the significant economic and social benefits associated with the nationally significant WBSL and its proposed expansion, collectively combined to constitute material considerations of sufficient weight to amount to ‘very special circumstances’ that clearly outweighed the identified harm to Green Belt to enable planning permission to be granted subject to conditions.

In addition to the significant economic benefits and social benefits, significant landscaping is proposed to assist in offsetting the visual impact of the development. This includes: 186 new trees to be planted including an orchard and semi-mature Oak trees; 19,519sqm of new woodland planting; 487sqm of native hedgerow; 429sqm of coppice planting; 1,565sqm of native scrub planting; 425 linear metres of formal hedgerows; and 3,458sqm of ornamental shrub planting. The Lower Field will also be maintained in perpetuity as an accessible green space for ecological and environmental benefits and the proposed development will deliver a BNG of 12.65% (habitat units) and 51.90% (hedgerow units).

12. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Keith Martin

Can the lead member give an update of the reaction at the various area forums/ public meetings he has attended regarding the council's Local Plan consultation?

Written Response:

I am pleased that the plan appears to be receiving widespread support especially from the various residents associations which have emailed their members urging Yes votes for questions 1, 3 and 5. When independent groups email their members saying "Overall, we strongly support the proposed Plan, it achieves a good balance between providing new homes for local people with protecting Green Belt.* I know we have done the right approach on this.

13. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Chris Lloyd

Can the lead member confirm that it is required by Government to include all available Brownfield sites in its Site allocations in a Local Plan?

Written response:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries the local authority needs to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This includes making sure we make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites. The independent Inspector will consider this at the Local Plan examination and would question why any available brownfield sites have not been included.

14. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Paul Rainbow

Can the lead member please provide an update on the progress of the possible Watford to Croxley link project?

Written response:

Following the cancellation of the Metropolitan Line Extension project Hertfordshire County Council, in conjunction with Watford BC and Three Rivers DC and other major stakeholders, are looking at alternative use of the disused railway line between Watford and Croxley. Following an initial feasibility study consultants, Atkins, were commissioned to develop further design concepts of a series of public transport and active travel transport options.

This further work has provided options for two route proposals both linking with Croxley station, and for either a trackless tram or VLR (Very Light Rail) option. Wider area improvements for sustainable travel are also being looked at as part of the scheme to promote sustainable transport in and around the disused alignment. This further report will further inform a Strategic Outline Business Case which is currently

being prepared but it is looking like the trackless tram option will offer the best benefits and best value for money

15. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Sarah Nelmes

Can the lead member please provide more details of how he expects the Local Plan, and its policy requirements will help those on the housing register and in temporary accommodation to be housed in Three Rivers?

Written response:

The emerging Local Plan policy on Affordable Housing requires a provision of 40% of all new housing to be affordable housing. 75% of this affordable housing will be for social rent, contributing to meeting the need on the housing register. The lower housing growth option consultation planned for 4,852 new dwellings across the District, so that would potentially deliver 1,940 affordable homes of which 1,455 would be for social rent. It should be noted that the emerging policies and housing numbers may be adjusted as we finalise the Local Plan prior to submission. The delivery of new affordable homes through sites allocated in the Local Plan is key to meeting the needs of those on the housing register and in temporary accommodation.

16. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

At a recent meeting in Croxley Green there was grave concern that the location of respondents to the local plan questions may not be taken into account. For example, any comments to a small local site. It was very clear that most attendants want that the comments who have a post code close to a site have their comments given priority. Can you please give an assurance that this will be done and made clear in the consultation feedback.

Written response:

Local Plan consultations are strategic in nature covering the whole District. No priority is given to local comments, in the same way that the consultation is not a vote; it is the content of the comments that is important. Any comments that are justified will be considered and weighed up against other comments, technical and material considerations. Ultimately at Local Plan examination the Inspector will not be considering whether a site is popular or unpopular, but whether it is suitable in planning terms.

17. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Narinder Sian

How does this council plan to spend CIL receipts from developments in Croxley Green in the next year?

Written response:

Strategic CIL monies held by the Council are not allocated to specific areas, the monies received can be spent anywhere in the District provided a strategic infrastructure project meets the CIL regulations and local requirements. The Council will review, assess and respond and bring to Committee any bids for CIL monies but none are outstanding or pending for Croxley Green at this stage (or across the District). The CIL application process is now twice a year with the next opportunity to submit applications on 1 January 2024.

With regard to the parish CIL funds, any levy received by Croxley Green Parish Council is spent within that parish.

18. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Narinder Sian

Could the lead provide rational why indicative drawings and the subsequent details released to the Croxley Green Residents Association were not included in the Local Plan consultation for site CG65: British Red Cross Community Way.

Written response:

The local plan process and planning application process are separate. The indicative drawings and details provided were in relation to a potential planning application and are in draft stage. These drawings as the question says are indeed “indicative” and as the member well knows requires further work not least as regards comments from Herts County Council and others and thus they are not finalised. In terms of a site allocation, we are only really looking at the principle of development on the site including location, site boundary, indicative number of dwellings etc. It would only be for larger strategic sites that are providing infrastructure on site that we would include indicative master plans during a consultation.

Should a planning application be submitted for the site in question prior to completion of the site it will be considered by the planning committee on its own merits. Should the application then be approved it would be removed as a local plan site and included in the commitments figure. Commitments are extant planning permissions that can be counted towards the local plan housing target.

19. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Philip Hearn

Is the Lead Member concerned that residents of the proposed 190 dwellings on the Chorleywood Station Car Park site will park on neighbouring roads if they don't have their own parking space?

Written response:

Chorleywood Station is a highly sustainable location due to its access to both mainline trains and the London Underground. It is also close to local facilities and services. Notwithstanding, all allocated sites will be expected to be 100% local plan policy compliant. As such, the development would be required to meet the parking standards set out in the emerging local plan.

20. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Philip Hearn

In light of the recent planning permission approval for the widening of an access track on Croxley Green Common, has the Lead Member reviewed their assertion that the proposal for 190 dwellings on Chorleywood Station Car Park does not threaten Chorleywood Common?

Written response:

Yes and it does not threaten Chorleywood Common despite the misleading information put out by others on this subject. Chorleywood Common does not form part of this Local Plan site and it is owned by the Parish Council, covered by DEFRA rules, a trust deed and an Act of Parliament.

Discussions with the Highways Authority are ongoing regarding potential Local Plan site allocations, with further representations expected as a result of the latest round of Regulation 18 consultation. Should the site not be acceptable in highways terms it will be amended in order to be made acceptable, for example by reducing the dwelling capacity, or if this is not possible the site will be removed from the Local Plan as it would no longer be considered suitable for development. Equally Transport for London may decide to withdraw given the strict conditions we are placing on it in the draft Local Plan.

As the member is well aware there have been no objections from the highways authority for its inclusion, Herts County Council, who state it's a highly sustainable location hence it could not be excluded as an available Brownfield site on highways grounds. Only sites that are suitable, available and achievable will be included in the local plan site allocations.

21. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Is the Lead Member aware of any conservation area appraisals in the country that are older than Rickmansworth's, which is 30 years old?

Written response:

There is no common database of conservation area appraisals across the country, so it is not possible to make a wider comparison. The Council had agreed to put the conservation area programme on hold in order to focus resource on the Local Plan. The Head of Planning Policy and Conservation will be reporting to the General Public Services and Economic Development Committee in the new year. This will consider the conservation area appraisal programme and the resources required for its delivery.

22. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Why did Three Rivers District Council's taxpayer-funded leaflet sent to households claiming there was a "Government requirement" to build 11,466 houses in the district,

when the decision report explicitly said that there is no such requirement, and credits the fact that there isn't for the council changing its policy on the Green Belt?

Written response:

The National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance require the council to, as a minimum, plan for its objectively assessed needs as calculated by the government's standard method. As such, this can be considered a government requirement. The 11,466 new homes standard method target was the starting point when considering the development needs of the District. The decision report stated this, however it set out that there may be some scope to argue the case of not meeting this target due to the constrained nature of the District in terms of Green Belt. This was not based on any changes in policy or law as none had been made at this stage.

The government has set out its intention to update national Green Belt policy, but this policy has not yet been updated. The Levelling and Regeneration Act has received royal ascent however we are still awaiting the accompanying regulations and updates to national planning policy. The Council has to work to the existing policy and legal framework and until those changes are made we cannot second guess what changes will come into force.

In preparing its low housing growth option the Council has changed its approach to the Green Belt. Whereas previously the Council has attempted to meet its standard method target in full with the vast majority of new homes being on Green belt sites (due to the lack of suitable and available brownfield sites). This approach had been taken in the past as evidence from other Local Plan examinations was that the plans were being rejected if they did not meet their standard method targets, even if that did mean developing in the Green Belt. Through the Secretary of State's letter to ministers and the government's consultation on planning reform the government set out its intent to amend Green Belt policy. Officers stated in the decision report that this **may potentially** mean more leniency in terms of meeting the standard method target as we are so constrained by Green Belt. Officers also set out in the same report that there were risks to this approach and the Local Plan could still get rejected for failing to meet, or at least getting closer to meeting, the standard method target. Members acknowledged the risks, but still felt that a lower housing growth option would be the best approach.

As already stated national policy on Green Belt remains unchanged, however there is a chance that the independent examiner may take a different interpretation of the policy than has been to date. If they do not take a different interpretation they will likely pause the examination and ask us to find more Green Belt sites as was the case with Welwyn Hatfield's Local Plan.

In the meantime, if the government does update Green Belt policy prior to the Local Plan being submitted we will then adjust the approach to be in line with new national policy.

23. Question to the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Will the Lead Member apologise for falsely claiming in leaflets to his constituents that he was responsible for the change of wording of the Local Plan site allocation for Land North of Bucknalls Lane to protect residents from traffic coming via residential roads, when the amendment was tabled by me and seconded by Cllr Hearn and when he opposed the wording being changed?

Written Response:

The questioner is incorrect, I did no such thing. The 2021 Local Plan consultation showed no access planned from Bucknalls Lane. The August 3rd Local Plan Committee I asked, and it was agreed that the consultation on this site show that access be required from the A405. Conservative councillors voted against this site being consulted on . On Sept 27th the Local Plans papers for public consultation were published for the Councils P& R committee saying that “access would be expected from the A405”. On October 2nd a Conservative leaflet was delivered falsely claimed “Lib Dem Council plans proposes access via Bucknalls Lane..,” This was 5 days after the papers were published and the Council web site.

Oct 5th Policy & Resources. After consulting officers, I agreed to get all party support changes to wording so that the consultation would read “Access would be required to be from A405”., This was agreed by all councillors and thus not only not opposed by me but included.

After that meeting I discussed with officers the final wording given the plan shows a small strip of land potentially given access to Bucknalls Lane and thus to avoid any doubt in the consultation the officers agreed to my request to change this to “ Access would be required from the A405, with only pedestrian access considered acceptable from Bucknalls Lane.”. This was in the published papers for the consultation . Conservative Councillors voted against the plan.

24. Question to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow from Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst

Can the lead member please outline where the council is with Herts County Councils outlined consultation on its proposed LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan) ? And will he confirm that where proposals from HCC are wholly opposed by residents that they will not be supported by TRDC?

Written response:

Around 2000 responses were received following public consultation on the LCWIP, which closed in July 2023. A review of these consultation responses is being undertaken by HCC and Officers are advised they will be shared with Three Rivers DC shortly for review. Discussions will then be held between the two authorities on the representations received and discussions on next steps. As with any public consultation comments will be carefully considered as part of the decision making process.

25. Question to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow from Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst

Would the lead member outline the reason why the council is prevented from removing derelict, untaxed vehicles without MOTs?

Written response:

Unless the vehicle is obstructing traffic or otherwise causing a nuisance or does not appear to be abandoned (which is a matter of fact and degree for each particular case), and its' location does not contravene parking regulations, there is no law allowing local authority intervention. Neither the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 nor the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 assist. If the vehicle has an "active" owner, and the vehicle is lawfully parked, there are no grounds for a prosecution

26. Question to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

Can you give us a date for when the new parking restrictions will be in force in Croxley Green.

Written response:

Statutory consultation on the scheme is completed and the TRO is in the process of being sealed. Signs, lines and new P&D machines are to be implemented in December and it is anticipated formal enforcement of the scheme will commence early in the new year.

27. Question to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow, from Councillor Narinder Sian

Following on from my question at the October Full council meeting on the implementation of the Beryl bikes cycle scheme in the district. Could the lead provide an update on the progress being made.

Written response:

A report is to be presented to P&R Committee on 6 December with an update on the Watford BC Beryl Bike scheme and a proposal for a 2 year pilot project for an extension of the scheme into Croxley Green.

This is something that I and Cllr Giles-Medhurst have worked hard to achieve over the last three years, and I am pleased that Council has now reached an agreement and found the funding for this that ties in with Watford Council re-award of the contract. We will closely monitor this scheme and if successful, which I hope it will be, I would like to see it extended into other parts of the district.

28. Question to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow, from Councillor Philip Hearn

Does the Lead Member agree that the upcoming parking changes at Money Hill Parade will not resolve the parking problems in this area? Is not the fundamental issue the lack of parking spaces for the Parade's users?

Written response:

The role of the Local Authority as a Parking Authority is to manage parking demand on the highway. The area currently has many parking issues and there have been public requests to support a solution to address footway parking, lack of accessible parking for shops, obstructive parking and the need for priority parking for residents. The proposed scheme has been developed partly to reduce parking pressure on residential streets from demands for parking in the retail and commercial area of Moneyhill Parade but also to address some of these other concerns presented to the Local Authority including aiding the flow of traffic on the main road. Introducing a parking scheme will help to improve the local environment by controlling and managing the impact of on-street parking, by improving access and safety for people walking and cycling and by promoting responsible driving. The scheme is still being reviewed following further requests for changes and further public consultation is expected.

There has been extensive consultation with residents and Maby meetings with the ward members including those from Cllr Hearn's party who are well aware of the issues. Each of the consultations have raised new issues and the ward members have requested many changes which has delayed the progress.

29. Questions to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow, from Councillor Stephen King

Can the Lead Member advise what progress has been made with regard to the consultation regarding parking outside 16-42 Gosforth Lane, the Sports Centre and proposed double yellow lines at the junction of Otley Way and Gosforth Lane since he was last asked about it in July and said he expected a public consultation which needless to say had not arrived, in "the Autumn".

Written response:

Following the implementation of new waiting restrictions on Oxhey Drive and in the immediate vicinity, Officers are now pursuing this secondary scheme in Gosforth Lane.

30. Questions to the Lead Member for Public Services, Councillor Paul Rainbow, from Councillor Stephen King

Given that neither Hertfordshire County Council nor Thrive Homes are accepting responsibility for the lamp column outside 5 Jubilee Walk in South Oxhey and Three Rivers has not responded to Councillor Cox's enquiry on the matter can the Lead Member confirm that it is this authority's responsibility to make it work?

Written response:

The lamp specified is not owned nor is it maintained by Three Rivers District Council and as such it not this authority's responsibility to make it work.

31. Questions to the Lead Member for Housing, Public Health, and Wellbeing, Councillor Andrew Scarth, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Under the Armed Forces Covenant Act 2021, and the statutory guidance adopted in November 2022, Three Rivers District Council is legally required to give due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant when adopting a homelessness strategy. However, the draft homelessness strategy makes no reference to the Armed Forces Covenant, nor did the officers' report accompanying it. Why was it not mentioned and why is the statutory guidance not being followed?

Written response:

When adopting a new homelessness strategy, the Council is required to give due regard to several different areas of legislation, this includes the Armed Forces Covenant Act 2021. There is no requirement to list within the strategy what legislation has been given due regard, however, I have spoken with the Council's Strategic Housing Manager and can confirm that due regard has been given to the Armed Forces Covenant Act 2021. As the strategy is in its draft form and currently out for formal consultation, I would encourage the Member to provide this feedback to the Service via this consultation and they will consider including this confirmation in the final document.

32. Question to the Lead Member for Leisure, Councillor Chris Lloyd, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

The question on why Three Rivers have not provided a public toilet and a drinking water fountain in the Barton way recreation ground at the last council meeting. The answer at the last council meeting did not address this, especially we do have a building there which is only used for football players at present. Could this use be widened? Can this be given some serious thought and if not why not.

Written response:

As was outlined in my response at the previous meeting of this Council and in addition to that as has already been explained to officer responses on 29th June and again earlier this month on 9 November, Three Rivers District Council operates a Community Toilet Scheme which provides members of the public access to buildings that already have toilets and are in the local areas/vicinity of our parks and open spaces. Three Rivers District Council does not operate public toilets for a number of reasons, including the resources that would be necessary to maintain them, for example the staff required to open and close them, as well as ASB issues which commonly occur. The pavilions are indeed used by football clubs; however, they pay for access and use of this facility.

Three Rivers District Council did previously have a water fountain at the Skate Park in Baldwins Lane. This was removed a number of years ago as a result of ongoing

Anti-Social Behaviour, the pressures of constant repairs and that during the winter months the pipes would freeze needing additional maintenance, all of which all became incredibly costly on top of the regular maintenance that water fountains require including regular cleaning and checks for diseases such as legionella. The council does not have the required budgetary nor human resources to be able to undertake these works and therefore has no current plans to reconsider these matters.

33. Question to the Lead Member for Sustainability and Climate, Councillor Jon Tankard, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

Please can you give the members a list of the number of houses in each EPC band and an estimation of how many houses will need to be upgraded each year to meet net zero by 2045.

Written response:

Please find see below data on the number of houses in each EPC band in Three Rivers (source: Parity Projects Pathways, October 2023).

The latter part of the question is highly complex and not possible to answer without further commissioned reports and data modelling which would still only produce approximations, for several reasons:

- There is not a standardised carbon footprint for each EPC rating as dwellings are all different, for example, a home with an EPC B rating could emit 0.5tCO₂/yr or 1.3tCO₂/yr. The highest possible EPC rating of “A” does not necessarily equate to a zero-carbon home.
- Existing homes each have their own “ceiling” to how low-carbon they can be (and many will never be zero carbon due to constraints on the measures they can have).
- “Net zero” is a relative term referring to a balance between emissions added to the atmosphere and emissions removed from the atmosphere, so it is complex to estimate the carbon emissions reductions required to balance the carbon emissions added to the atmosphere year-on-year until 2045.
- The ever-declining carbon intensity of Grid-supplied energy would need to be factored into any calculations of how many properties would need to be retrofitted annually to reach net zero by 2045, and the carbon-intensity of the Grid year-on-year is subject to some level of uncertainty depending on central Government policy and regulatory interventions, the renewable energy generation capacity of the UK etc.
- The rate of uptake of energy efficiency improvements by owner-occupiers (76% of Three Rivers’ housing) is uncertain, and unlikely to be linear, making calculating the number of homes needing to be retrofitted each year to reach net-zero by 2045 challenging.

A copy of ‘Decarbonisation of Housing in Three Rivers’ (2021) is available upon request from the Strategy and Partnerships team for more detailed information. Net Zero has not been explicitly modelled in the report as it is widely accepted that there is a “ceiling” to how low-carbon each retrofitted home can be, depending on a range of factors including the property age, size, type, tenure, location, planning constraints, and the circumstances of occupants.

To maximise the energy efficiency of Three Rivers' homes, under the High Ambition scenario which would be closest to "net zero" though not equivalent to it, heat pumps were recommended in roughly 30,000 homes (78% of the stock), alongside loft insulation top-ups for ~19,400 homes, cavity wall insulation for ~8,200 homes, external wall insulation for ~7,200 homes, and internal wall insulation for ~3,000 homes.

34. Question to the Lead Member for Sustainability and Climate, Councillor Jon Tankard, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

As you know I consider Pluvial flooding as a real risk for many households in Three Rivers, as across the country. This is due to the heavier storms we are now getting because of climate change and our under maintained highway drains and the lack of capacity. Will you support working together with Hertfordshire flood team and BRE to put together information to help householders that may be at risk protect themselves. I have a meeting set up in December and want to feedback to your team.

Written response:

Please do invite the Climate Change Team to the BRE meeting, we acknowledge the issue within our recent climate resilience risk register and will be updating our greener living guide over the coming months. Information is also available on our website.

35. Question to the Sustainability and Climate, Councillor Jon Tankard, from Councillor Narinder Sian

Could the lead provide targets and timelines on how the Council intends to increase the number of Wildflower meadows in the district.

Written response:

The Council are not necessarily seeking at this time to increase the quantity of our wildflower meadows but rather to improve the quality and, in some cases, size of the meadows we already have in conjunction with other biodiversity opportunities being taken across the District.

Further information can be found in the report to Leisure, Environment and Community Committee on 15th March 2023 (<https://moderngov.threerivers.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1141&MId=1345>) which highlights that in 2022 12% of TRDC owned and managed grass is classed as permanent grass (e.g. sports pitches, cemeteries) and only 16% of TRDC owned and managed grass is classed as amenity grass for general recreation. Permanent amenity grass in the district is not available to be managed for biodiversity, as it already has a recreation, access, or similar purpose. Work continues to improve the accuracy of habitat mapping in the District which may therefore alter the numbers. Officers will provide an update on the biodiversity opportunities audit including grassland management for 2023-24 in the annual report in Spring 2024.

36. Question to the Lead Member for Community Safety, Councillor Steve Drury, from Councillor Abbas Merali

What is Three Rivers District Council doing to bring our community together in the current environment? What has been done to increase community cohesion and prevent all hate crime, including antisemitism and Islamophobia?

Written response:

We continue to work with our community around Hate Crime. Three Rivers District Council is a third-party reporting centre whereby anyone can report hate crime to the council. We have also implemented the third-party reporting centre to meet the needs of the wider community at our South Oxhey Healthy Hub. The website also offers support mechanisms along with reporting lines.

<https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/services/crime-and-safety/hate-crime>

Every year we promote Hate Crime Awareness Week and this year we promoted the victim support side of hate crime with the Police and True Vision.

There have been 2 incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti in the district over the last 3 months. This was removed by our grounds team within a matter of hours. The Community Safety and Safeguarding Manager is a Prevent Lead and works with the Community Safety Unit and Prevent team at Hertfordshire County Council. She also works with our Hate Crime Officer for Police who is an attendee at our ASBAG monthly meetings and is proactive in her work within our community whereby there are a number of events planned and delivered year on year.

The weekly Community Tensions Report from Hertfordshire County Council gives us details about community tensions across Hertfordshire. Where we see a rise or concern in any community tension, we are reactive in reaching out to those groups and working in collaboration.

Community events have been organised and held during 2023 to bring residents together to celebrate and raise awareness of different cultures, faiths and organisations within the district and improve community cohesion. These events include:

Mill End Community Fair, Eid themed craft event, Easter themed Craft event, Leavesden Community Fair, Windrush Day themed craft event, Rosh Hashana themed craft event, Diwali themed craft event, Black History Month event, Christmas themed craft event (upcoming).

We continue to engage with our communities through the Community Support Forums which brings together a range of locally based organisations to share information on concerns and needs.

37. Question to the Lead Member for Community Safety, Councillor Steve Drury, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

In the Lead Member's last written response to a question by myself, he said that Three Rivers District Council would look at moving CCTV from the Community Safety Partnership to where Chestnut Avenue meets the A404 if residents wanted it. Is 104

residents signing a petition calling for CCTV at that sight not enough to show that it is what residents want?

Written response:

Residents have been sent details following the petition for CCTV as to how to submit a request for temporary CCTV. There is a specific redeployment form that needs to be completed asking for the redeployment and it must have a Community Safety Board Sponsor. This should be sent to the Community Safety Team. Requests are assessed by the board against the need/priority of locations.

We then need to establish if a camera can be moved and contact Herts CCTV to establish if there is a viable lamppost for the camera to be moved to in the requested area. If there is a camera that can be moved and a viable place for it to be moved to a consultation letter will be sent to all the properties in the area asking for any opposition to the camera being placed there. This lasts for 14 days. If there is no opposition, a HCCTV Deployment form will be completed and send to HCCTV. If there is no viable lamppost, there is a further cost to the redeployment to enable to the move.

38. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

Thank you for sharing the background to the financial risk register with me. Please can you confirm what the three largest financial risks are to the council and what is being done about them to ensure we do not go further into deficit during the next 3 years.

Written response:

The three highest risks the Council faces are:

- The Medium Term Financial position worsens.
- The pay award exceeds estimates included in the MTFP resulting in unplanned and unsustainable use of reserves.
- Other inflationary increases exceed estimates included in the MTFP resulting in unplanned and unsustainable use of reserves.

The Council each year as part of its budget process looks for savings to bring the budgets back in line. This is common with all local authorities as all are subject to the same increases in costs. The budget monitoring elsewhere on the agenda shows that in year the position has improved by £320k at the end of the first quarter and we continue to manage budgets tightly to contain pressures. Fees and charges elsewhere on the agenda are the first step in closing the potential gap next year and once we have the local government finance settlement, which is expected to be late this year, we will bring forward additional proposals.

39. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

I have been asked by a number of local residents what investments has Three Rivers made towards indoor community space in Croxley Green since the Red Crose Hall and the Community Centre were built in the 1960s, partly by public subscription.

Written response:

The Building cost was £21,433 in 1966. This was financed by grants from HCC, RUDC- there was a deficiency of £2482 which was raised by public appeal :2/6 bricks. RUDC made the £3K load to ensure the building could open. The Land was gifted by Rickmansworth Urban District Council.

The Council owns the land on which the hall is built but not the building itself, therefore would not have spent significant sums of money on the building. Any more minor expenditure would be within repairs and maintenance budgets and not separated out.

40. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

At the last full Council meeting you gave a written answer to say the Red Cross hall in Croxley Green is not dilapidated. Can you please correct the misleading article in the Lib Dem leaflet that stated it was in the next Focus newsletter. This will clear up the misunderstanding and help the existing mobility aids group who operate every weekday.

Written response:

I apologise for the incorrect use of the word dilapidated in this context, a word that has a very specific meaning on property matters, rather than in common usage.

I refer to the letter to TRDC from the Clerk of the Parish Council dated 25th February to Jo Wagstaffe where it was stated " We have investigated surveyed the condition of the building, estimated costs of repairs and alterations required to restore it to meet current standards (dilapidations)... "

Given that CGPC almost four years ago accepted that there were dilapidations and that since then I understand from more recent visits the building still requires major works to restore it to I see nothing wrong in the statement made.

41. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

I congratulate the officers who run the phone system for improving the wait times following the motion that was agreed in February. 100% answered within 20 minutes and over 80% in under 5 minutes (Sept). Can you please state how this is being done and whether you can see further improvements so that no one waits for more than 10 minutes except in unforeseen circumstances.

Written response:

The Customer Service Centre balance a variety of duties including providing administrative support for services, staffing the Visitor Centre, responding to online enquiries, and answering the phones. The staff roster is structured to accommodate expected peaks in customer call demand whilst also balancing the other duties. In

addition, incoming calls are monitored live to respond to changes in customer demand. The reduction in call wait times is due to a combination of factors, including the number of staff vacancies at any one time, and refinement in the roster. I expect there to be a small reduction in call wait times over the next 6 months, however call wait times may increase slightly during particularly busy months. The team are close to optimal performance based on current staff resources.

42. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

Does the Lead Member believe that our residents can have confidence in Three Rivers District Council's finances considering the auditors have not signed off the accounts for three years?

Written response:

This is a sectoral wide problem which has been building for a number of years. The Government is introducing a new regulator for local audit ARGA and the Minister for Local Government has recently written to the Financial Reporting Council, NAO and CIPFA to ask them to act to address the problem.

The Levelling Up Housing and Communities Committee published its report on the 24th November and concluded:

“Local audit—and local government more widely—is in the middle of a crisis that is undermining public trust. One of the most pressing symptoms of this crisis is a large and growing backlog of accounts whose audits have not been completed, some of them up to seven years old.”

The Council is not happy with the delays and issues with local audit and indeed our Director of Finance gave evidence to the Select Committee on the issues with local audit. She also sits on CIPFA/LASAAC which is the accounting standards committee for local government who are seeking to improve reporting and help clear the backlog.

43. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

Who will take responsibility if Three Rivers District Council's accounts are not signed off because of the failure to produce the paperwork for an £150 million project?

Written response:

If the Councillor is referring to the accounting for the South Oxhey initiative, the issue the Council has is with how work in progress is accounted for. As part of the audit of the 2017/18 Accounts, and included in the audit letter for that year, EY required the Council to change the way it accounted for work in progress on the South Oxhey scheme under accounting standard IAS 40, as inventory. This treatment was carried forward into 2018/19. For 2019/20, the auditor has requested that we go back to treating work in progress at South Oxhey as work in progress.

Once the capital receipt is received any inventory or work in progress is written out of the accounts, so this does not have any impact upon the final recognition of the South Oxhey impact.

44. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

Does the Lead Member agree with Three Rivers District Council's Head of Finance that "It's not acceptable that we are still on the 2019/20 audit"?

Written response:

The Lead Member fully agrees that it is unacceptable that the Council is still on the 2019/20 audit. Lee Rowley, then Minister for Local Government, made a statement on the 14th of July before giving evidence to the Select Committee on the 17th. In his statement he said:

"In advance of the evidence session, I would like to update you on work since Spring this year that my department, along with Financial Reporting Council colleagues, has undertaken on proposals to address the significant backlog of local government audits in England and develop a sustainable solution to the timeliness challenges which the local audit sector has faced in recent years.....

While the proposals will be subject to further work and engagement across the system over the Summer, this constitutes significant further progress. The intention is that, subject to the conclusion of the appropriate details, agreed changes will be implemented by the end of this year."

We are still awaiting a formal announcement on those changes.

45. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

Will the Lead Member apologise for £1,500 of taxpayer's money being wasted on an external report being prepared for the auditors that was not fit for purpose?

Written response:

As part of the Audit Process, the Council is required to obtain valuations on its Property. These valuations are then subject to review by valuation experts within EY. Unfortunately, as valuation is a subjective exercise this does lead to differences in expert opinion. The impact of these differences in expert opinion is amplified by the fact that auditors set the Council's materiality threshold in relation to its revenue account meaning that any differences above £51.9K have to be reported on a balance sheet figure for land and buildings of £55.1M.

46. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Andrea Fraser

I was delighted to see that the War Memorial in Rickmansworth was cleaned for this year's Remembrance Sunday event. Batchworth Residents contribute every year via

Special Expenses for this cleaning. Should Three Rivers District Council provide a rebate for any years when this cleaning did not take place?

Written response:

The charge to Batchworth residents is set at a level that builds up a pot of funding to pay for the cleaning when it needs to be carried out. If we did not charge residents for this every year there would be a greater cost in the years when work is carried out.

47. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

In October, when the Lead Member asked what price he thinks Three Rivers District Council would pay for the extra transparency of publishing FOI responses – as many councils do and the Information Commissioner’s Office recommends – his full answer was “-“. Aside from the deliberate lack of transparency in that answer, does that mean Three Rivers District Council would do it even if it cost nothing or that the Lead Member refuses to answer for another reason?

Written response:

Given our constrained resources we have used data on our Freedom of Information requests to guide the development of our new website and improve accessibility of published information to members of the public. We want to provide businesses and residents in the district with accurate and relevant information to help promote public understanding of our organisation and activities. To meet this goal, we publish a broad range of information on this website.

For a list of all the information we routinely publish, see the [Freedom of Information Publication Scheme \(PDF, 133 KB\)](#).

To publish more would require additional software that we do not currently have as well as additional staff resource to manage this process.

48. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Will the Lead Member commit to reducing the amount declared as Special Expenses to pay for Watersmeet if Batchworth Community Council designates different premises as the council’s community hall, given a large element is paid due to this usage?

Written response:

The calculation of special expenses is laid down in legislation and it is for the Council to determine when and how special expenses will be charged. It has been made clear to the Councillor on previous occasions that the decisions of Batchworth Community Council do not automatically lead to a change in special expenses.

49. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Oliver Cooper

Will the Lead Member explain why Three Rivers District Council charges Special Expenses for Watersmeet to the unparished area when much of the unparished area is nowhere near Watersmeet?

Written response:

The calculation of special expenses is laid down in legislation and it is for the Council to determine when and how special expenses will be charged in line with the legislation. This requires that a charge is made to the unparished area for certain functions.

50. Question to the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Keith Martin, from Councillor Stephen King

Can the Lead Member confirm this authority now has plans in place showing the seating arrangements for both the Full Council, committee meetings and sub-committee meetings given the difficulties experienced regarding table layouts in recent months?

Written response:

The recent staffing changes in the Committee Team have contributed to this and now that the Team is fully staffed consistent seating arrangements have been developed and will be implemented going forward.

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