

Written responses to question – 14 March 2023

A. Question from Councillor Snowdon to Councillor Rouane, Leader of the council.

Can the leader explain how South Oxfordshire District Council's own planning application P22/V2705/FUL, which proposes to tarmac over open green spaces earmarked as a wildflower meadow next to a proposed allotment, which will destroy a huge amount of biodiversity, whilst also being overshadowed by brownfield industrial land, meets with the alleged priorities of this council to tackle the climate emergency?

Written Response

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will take over responsibility for the maintenance and management of large areas of open space at Great Western Park once the land is handed over from the developers in an adoptable condition.

Our application proposed to make best use of a small area of the land in the Vale of White Horse that is currently being intensively used by the developers as a storage compound for materials (whilst they build homes) to establish a grounds maintenance hub for both this council and the Vale of White Horse District Council. This will help our grounds maintenance teams to respond quicker to service requests in the area, reduce travel time and carbon emissions, and ultimately serve the community more efficiently.

The proposed grounds maintenance hub does not impact on the developer's ability to deliver its requirements, including allotments, and clearly the responsible Councils will have the ability to choose how to manage the whole Great Western Park area in the years ahead. We are increasingly taking a biodiversity focussed approach to offset environmental impacts. This will include planting additional areas as wildflower meadows, to reflect the fact that a small area that had been proposed to be planted in this way (after the developer eventually vacated their compound) would instead have been used for the grounds maintenance hub and we will look to include enhancements such as screening and tree planting as part of any provision.

Following our engagement with the local community, the Councils will be working with our planning agent to determine next steps in relation to a planning application that better demonstrates what is proposed and the very clear and positive rationale for this. Our proposals are about serving the whole resident population of the Great Western Park community, who we expect will want to benefit from beautiful public spaces, carefully managed in the most efficient and climate responsible way that we can, whilst also meeting the needs of residents across South Oxfordshire.

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B. Question from Councillor Snowdon to Councillor Bennett, Cabinet member for economic development and regeneration

Will the Cabinet member responsible for delivering infrastructure on housing developments explain in his almost four years in that role, what he has delivered for the residents of Great Western Park, Didcot now that the final houses have been completed? In particular, the GP surgery, allotments, youth shelter, orchard, playparks and so on, which are all part of the masterplan?

Written Response

We are all keen to see valued infrastructure delivered, but the question infers that it is the Council that are responsible for delivering these facilities, which is simply not correct, although statements made by previous administrations may well, perhaps, have implied this was the case.

The facilities referred to in this question are, and always have been, identified to be delivered by either the developer, or by other partners, as part of the completion of the development, not by the Council. Even so, we have voluntarily committed significant senior officer time to holding developers and others to account regarding their commitments, which has led to significant progress.

I hope Councillor Snowdon, as an experienced councillor, will be supportive in accurately communicating to residents what are, and are not, the responsibilities of the council in these matters, because part of our role as ward members is to explain accurately how these planning processes work.

In addition to over 2,600 homes that have been delivered the site has already delivered schooling, a nursery, a community centre, retail, an extra care facility and sports provision as well as supporting the creation of a vibrant and positive sense of community.

Whilst there is no statutory role for the council in the provision of healthcare facilities, I understand the Vale of White Horse District Council is positively supporting the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board and related stakeholders to procure the provision of the healthcare facilities on GWP. I believe regular meetings are taking place between the various parties to move the project forward and the ICB/Vale of White Horse District Council is looking to share a joint update with local residents shortly.

C. Question from Councillor Bartholomew to Councillor Rouane, Leader of the council

The bulky waste collection service was suspended at the beginning of the year, so when residents tried to book collection, they were advised they should take bulky items to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) themselves. This suggestion was not helpful, as residents that use the collection service are generally ones that are unable to take bulky items to HWRCs themselves! Furthermore, any suspension is likely result in an increase in fly-tipping.

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Why was so little advance publicity given to this matter and why was proper advance planning not in place to avoid any suspension of the service in the first place?

Written Response

The bulky waste collection service is suspended every year in January while the waste contractor catches up on normal collection because of the Christmas bank holidays. It also helps them to collect all the extra Christmas waste presented at this time. This suspension is planned well in advance and residents wishing to make a booking are made aware through the booking system on the councils' website.

The suspension period was different this year as we needed to use it to carry out work on IT systems and collection processes to ensure we met our legal requirements for the collection and disposal of upholstered domestic seating, such as sofas, armchairs and home office chairs. How we collect and dispose of these items changed from the start of 2023, and we needed to ensure we were able to provide the service whilst protecting the environment and meeting legislative requirements.

Officers had anticipated that the service would reopen again, as normal, at the start of February, but this was delayed due to some technical issues in changing the booking system. Because the delay in reopening the service was anticipated to be relatively short, we communicated this to customers through the booking website, and this would have affected the approx. 40 households per week who use the service. This was as opposed to communicating to the wider 55,000+ households that have the regular household waste collection service.

I can confirm that the service fully reopened on 22 February.

During the suspension of the service, residents enquiring about a collection were reminded that, if they did not wish to keep hold of the items until the service restarted, there remained the option to take the items to their local Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC). We also reminded residents that they could consider donating items that are suitable for reuse to a number of charities.

It is acknowledged that the suspension may have impacted on the ability of some residents to book a bulky waste collection, but it was necessary to enable us to do the work that was required to continue to handle waste compliantly. I am pleased that the service has now fully reopened and will continue to operate as normal.