

27 June 2018

Ordinary Council

Public Questions

Report of: Philip Ruck – Chief Executive

Wards Affected: All Wards

This report is: Public

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution, a member of the public resident within the Borough may ask a maximum of two questions relating to the business of the Council providing notice has been received by 10.00am two working days before the relevant meeting.
- 1.2 If the person wishing to ask the question is not present at the meeting when the item is called the question(s) will be deleted from the list of questions to be asked.
- 1.3 Every question asked pursuant to rule 11.1 of the Constitution shall be put and answered without discussion but the Member to whom the question has been put may decline to answer. An answer may take the form of a direct oral answer at the Council meeting or where there has been insufficient time to research an answer, a written answer will be sent to the questioner.
- 1.4 Eight questions had been received.
- 1.5 Mrs Gearon-Simm submitted the following questions:

Brentwood Borough Council has outsourced the work of its Legal Department to Barking and Dagenham Council.

Both the work of the Housing Department and Licensing has been outsourced to Basildon Council.

In addition to this the work of Brentwood Borough Council's Planning Department has been outsourced to Thurrock Council.

1. How much is this costing the council taxpayers of Brentwood?
2. Is this arrangement going to be permanent?

1.6 Mr Skinner submitted the following questions

1. Local Development Plan ("LDP"): Priests Lane Sites 044 and 178

I note that the current Regulation 18 LDP Consultation has removed the inclusion of "open space and/or sports facilities for public use" as part of the proposed site when compared to the previous Regulation 18 Consultation in 2016 and the document presented to Council at the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 15 November 2017. This change appears to have been made on the basis of one letter from the owners of one of the sites in response to the 2016 Regulation 18 Consultation (response 15091) asking for the "open space and/or sports facilities for public use" to be deleted from the proposal stating that the land makes no contribution to either public open space or sports provision. First, the playing fields did used to be hired by non-school local sports organisations. Secondly, the 2005 Open Space Audit Report concluded that there were insufficient open space areas for the public in West Shenfield and that if land became available the opportunity to provide open space should be taken by the Council in this area. The land is also adjacent to two schools. Since that point, there has been no change in the provision of open space in West Shenfield. The 2016 Open Space Audit merely provides a stocktake of open space and does not draw any detailed conclusions unlike the more detailed work in 2005. In addition, Sport England made written objections to the development of these sites as representations to the 2016 Regulation 18 LDP Consultation stating that the development of these sites would contravene Government policy.

Please can Councillor McKinlay explain why the inclusion of "open space and/or sports facilities for public use" has been removed from this proposed site in the current Regulation 18 LDP Consultation?

2.LDP: Prioritisation of planning applications once LDP has been submitted

The Council rightly prioritises the development of brownfield sites before greenfield and greenbelt land. However, it is possible, even likely, that planning applications will be submitted for the greenfield and greenbelt sites first because they are most easily and profitably developed. Given that the housing projections may be overstated, it is possible that brownfield sites may be left undeveloped while the Community loses greenfield and greenbelt land.

What steps will the Council take to not only identify brownfield sites for priority development, but to ensure that these sites are actually developed before eating into precious resources of greenbelt and greenfield land?

1.7 Ms Pearson submitted the following questions:

1. Local Development Plan ("LDP"): The LDP includes an uplift on proposed new housing by a substantial 36% over the projected housing needs to meet affordability targets. This is presumably to suppress house prices by creating over supply. The Council recognised that the basis of these calculations is flawed because it ignores the earnings of the Borough residents working in London, whose spending power will always exceed those working in the Borough and so will always produce too high an uplift. This pressure to overbuild in the Borough is detrimental to the current residents and the Council should be taking steps to ensure the Borough's problem is recognised at Central Government. Other than sending in the response to the Government's consultation paper last year, what further steps has the Council taken to resolve this issue that is one of the most fundamental problems with the draft LDP now out for consultation?

2. The LDP states that the uplift calculated for housing affordability is 30%, a very high number in view of the Borough's restrictions. The Council has stated that the long-term population projections are unstable, they are based on historic data that are unlikely to factor in reduced migration post Brexit. It is likely that this 30% target is already over and above housing needs and yet the LDP uses a 36% uplift on housing needs to provide a buffer. How does the Council justify increasing the housing projections by a contingency of 6% when not only are the affordability calculations dubious but the population growth forecasts over 20 years are particularly unstable because of Brexit?

1.8 Mr Gooderson submitted the following questions.

1. *Councillor Aspinall made a request at the last Ordinary Council meeting for a conflicts of interests register as they relate to the Local Development Plan, but the Council legal team said there to is no need to collect this information from a legal perspective as the LDP is a consultation. Recently Westminster Council have been in the press with regard to poor practice where unrecorded benefits were provided by parties with an interest in Council and community business, such as developers. There is significant public concern that the inclusion of certain sites within the LDP will give a potential financial benefit to the owners of those sites. To allay growing public disquiet and to give transparency, please can the Councillors provide information to the public where they, or related parties, may have an interest, either as an owner, contractor or developer, in the sites or may have been provided with hospitality by interested parties, when the regulation 19 plan is presented for consultation?*

2. *I would like to ask each of the Councillors for my ward, Councillors Morrissey, Wiles and Barrett, at least two of who do not live in the ward, if they have made visits to Priests Lane and its junction with Middleton Hall Lane in the morning and evening school and work rush hours to experience what the current traffic situation is like. By this I mean a physical presence rather than just in a car adding to the traffic flow. Traffic congestion has been highlighted by many residents who have lodged comments about the current LDP. If they have not perhaps they would like to do soon say 3 occasions (which I believe is the standard applied for traffic surveys) to gain first-hand experience of the traffic. I would add that they should do so in the next few days before Brentwood Council break up for the summer holidays, although of course all of the A level students at the schools near the Town Centre have now left after their exams so the number of vehicle movements will have dropped already. I would hope that each councillor would report back to me once they have attended the area with their comments.*

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