



**Council**  
**24 June 2020**  
**Item 9 Questions to the Leader & Portfolio Holders**

**Question to the Leader from Councillor Luckhurst.**

Warwick District Council has for several years expressed a desire to move into new council offices on the Covent Garden site, enabling a housing development of the Riverside House site. Previously we'd been told that the Riverside House site was losing about £300,000 per year, the Town Hall about £75,000 per year, and that rapid replacement of the Covent Garden car park was required due to concrete cancer.

In light of the climate emergency and new ways of working due to the coronavirus lockdown, can you please update us on these plans, specifically?

1. When are these plans going ahead?
2. Will all the new buildings be designed and built to be carbon neutral in use?
3. Will all new housing be 100% council housing offered at social or affordable rents?
4. Can the new offices be designed with 0.5 desks per council officer i.e. with approximately 50% working from home?
5. Can the car parking provision be redesigned to principally be an e-transport hub for electric vehicles (cars, taxis, buses and bikes)?

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**Response from Councillor Day**

Before answering the specific questions, I should clarify that the reference to £300,000 is the estimated savings the Council would make if it moved to smaller premises. Likewise, the Town Hall saving is £85,000 per annum that would be achieved if the Council made the move it had previously proposed.

In February 2019 the then Executive agreed to pause the scheme and since then when I became Leader I said that we'd review the scheme with a particular view to maximising the community benefits. That review had not been concluded but in any case we are now further reviewing our plans, taking advantage of the learning from the Coronavirus lockdown and the advances that new technology can offer. At present, we are talking to our staff to best understand how we can support them to work more effectively at home but also in ways that help to maintain the organisational 'glue' that binds us to work cohesively. We will be bringing forward proposals for members to consider.

Our aim is to achieve net zero carbon emission overall as an organisation and our buildings need to be used and/or designed in a way that helps achieve that objective. It will of course be heavily influenced by our experience of working in the lockdown.

This will be an issue for the Council to consider. At the moment planning policy requires that all new housing on sites above 10 properties, requires 40% to be affordable. This includes a mixture of shared ownership, affordable rented and social rented housing. The latter is the largest proportion.

It could be but this is increasingly an outdated concept in the light of our lockdown experience. It is likely that offices will be for customer/community engagement; those who cannot work at home; and, for collaboration of teams and of project teams rather than the traditional rows of desks as before. It is likely therefore that there will be an even higher proportion of staff based at home but visiting offices when needed. Of course in the short term the plan for officers to return to the existing building is being worked up to ensure that the building is properly formatted to allow for social distancing and maintain staff safety.

Ideally we would seek any new structure to be designed to offer charging facilities for cars; and for bikes. Whether it is the right place for buses and taxis is a moot point and one that would need to be explored further.

### **Question to the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property from Councillor Kennedy**

As I am sure all members are aware, this week marks the first anniversary of the government's signing legislation to commit the UK to a legally binding target of net zero emissions by 2050.

We note that the Planning Committee on Wednesday 17th June approved our Council's proposal for six social-rent houses on Land East of Turpin Court (W/20/0158). While welcoming the fact that the project aims to go beyond prevailing sustainable development standards particularly with regard to environmental performance of buildings, we note that it does not incorporate higher environmental standards of building design and energy performance as set out in Leamington Town Council's emerging policy RLS2, and will not be zero carbon. In view of our declared climate emergency and unanimously agreed Climate Emergency Action Programme which aims for zero carbon in the Council by 2025, is this not a missed opportunity to do achieve this standard in the first buildings to be erected by the Council since the Emergency was declared? In view of our proposed Council Tax referendum next year, is it not important that we demonstrate the Council's commitment to zero carbon buildings? Will the Council publish quantitative data on performance-in-use carbon emissions using robust methodologies for this development? Will all future planning applications by the District Council for social housing or other buildings be net zero carbon both by design and in use?

### **Response from Councillor Matecki**

Turpin Court is a pilot scheme which has changed a number of times through the planning process to address the concerns of surrounding neighbours and take account of planning advice. The project aims to achieve net zero carbon and is using specialist consultants to provide advice and assess outcomes so that the Council can identify the best product for the future housing programme. Now that planning permission has been obtained, we are now moving to the detailed design of this scheme.

The project meets a number of aims, such as regenerating a vacant garage site, increasing affordable housing supply and achieving value for money for the HRA which all have to be taken into account when developing new affordable housing.

## **Question to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Community Protection from Councillor Skinner:**

As we slowly begin to come out of the lock down, I have heard many members of the community saying that they are concerned, if not scared, to even go out of the house for many reasons due to the pandemic and are thinking of isolating themselves even more. Also residents, particularly the elderly and vulnerable have had, and will continue to have many severe anxieties about finances, families, support, loneliness, safety and employment among many other things, due to a situation that none of us have ever experienced before.

What are the recovery plans please to improve resident's mental health and general well-being, that in addition to the economic recovery, can encourage and support people to find their way out of isolation, and for the Council to provide ongoing support to help relieve those anxieties and pressures the most vulnerable have?

## **Response from Councillor Falp**

I would like to thank Councillor Skinner for the question in advance.

I can understand the concern by some residents in coming out of their homes after many weeks of isolation. I think mental well-being is one of the many issues that have arisen due to Covid 19. In-fact loneliness has been an agenda item on the many health groups I along with officers sit on, with a range of partners even before Covid.

We have agreed this week to look at the Criteria for the Covid Emergency Grant Criteria from activities by organisations to help during the crisis to activities to address Issues such as loneliness and support as we come out of lock down. We hope to have this ready in the next couple of weeks for Executive and Group leaders to agree. This will hopefully allow our many Charities and Voluntary organisations to support our residents. We already give three year funding to Community Centres in Brunswick, Warwick and Lillington. We also fund job clubs in the centres. We have an active Community Support team who when allowed physically will work in the Community as well as virtually.

The team are supporting businesses to open safely with a range of measures to help keep infection down and they will of course enforce if needs be. Our Community Safety Team along with the C.C.T.V control room will be monitoring our Town Centres and as you know measures have been put in place to help with social distancing. All my Executive Colleagues have been working in their own Portfolio's to look at helping with finance, getting the economy going, parks and gardens, housing needs and of course the Environment. Communications are of course the key to all things so we will be working to make sure our residents know where to go for support.

### **Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Boad**

Can the Finance and Business Portfolio Holder tell the Council what are currently the additional costs incurred by this Council following the Governments instruction 'to do whatever is necessary' to tackle issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic?

Can he also inform us of the current value of the lost income due to the shut down?

Can he inform the Council of the value of the additional grants received by this Council to directly a) offset these costs, and b) provide support for the Council's lost income?

Does he recognise, in the light of the additional unplanned expenditure this year, the need to have a review of current planned expenditure and an emergency budget for the remainder of 2020/21 which could reduce this years impact on the 2021/22 budget?

### **Questions to the Portfolio Holder of Culture & Neighbourhood from Councillor Milton**

Please find below two questions which I would like to put forward this evening.

1) A continuing concern of neighbours of Castle Farm Leisure Centre over the last few years has been the lack of communication from District Council about progress. A number of promises have been made including regular email newsletters but unfortunately for the majority little has materialised. As the project reaches a crucial stage could you outline to Council what will be done to keep residents better informed?

2) The Consultation on the Abbey Fields Management Plan was completed in November last year. Can you please give Council an update on progress in particular the subject of cycling in Abbey Fields. Can you tell council when a Timescale will be available or at the very least a plan for a plan?