

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Trevor Teer to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Gladman Developments

In January 2017 Reading Borough Council Planning Committee unanimously voted to object to an outline planning application from Gladman Development to build 245 houses on the outskirts of Emmer Green. This objection was due to already congested roads, cross Thames bridges already being at capacity, our schools North of the River being full, inadequate healthcare provision and also because of the precedent that development on the border of Emmer Green could be used for future unplanned ribbon development taking place in this area, resulting in chaotic urban sprawl. In September 2017 SODC turned down the planning application for the development but Gladman Developments appealed and that appeal began on 1st May of this year. Due to SODC 's announcement on the first day of the hearing that they now have 5.4 yr housing land supply, as opposed to 4.1 yrs as was previously thought, the planning element of the appeal has been postponed until the end of August so that Gladman can reconsider their arguments and presumably try to discredit that higher figure. In light of this, and given RBC's robust opposition to this development, can the lead member for planning please share his plans for Reading Borough Council's involvement in this appeal and how he is going to help SODC fight this development ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Teer for his question.

Reading Borough Council objected to the Gladman's Development given the Council's concern that the development would have a significant impact on the local infrastructure, including roads and education, and that the development would be unlikely to be sustainable.

Following an appeal of the South Oxfordshire District Council decision to refuse planning permission, this Council submitted a statement confirming that Reading Borough Council has never sought development in South Oxfordshire as a location to accommodate future growth of Reading; and that there is concern that if this development were allowed it could set a precedent for the development of other sites currently being promoted adjacent to the boundary of Reading. The Inquiry opening was attended by the RBC Planning Officers.

In the time period prior to the Inquiry first opening, further information and documentation including a Unilateral Undertaking (a form of Legal Agreement) was submitted on behalf of the appellant.

The legal agreement specified the financial means to mitigate the impact of the development on highway infrastructure and open space facilities, in particular Clayfield Copse and Blackhouse Wood, if the Inspector were minded to allow the appeal. A mechanism to secure appropriate mitigation of these impacts has also now been secured between all necessary parties (the appellant/South Oxfordshire District Council/Oxfordshire County Council and Reading Borough Council).

Additional information was also submitted in relation to the road junctions in question, and improvements secured in order that the junctions can be suitably upgraded.

The Highway works to be secured within the Legal Agreement, if the appeal Inspector were to allow the appeal, would provide access to facilities and connect the footways within the site with the existing footway provision on both Peppard Road and Kiln Road. The vast majority of the development site would be located within 400m of bus route 26. The bus service is currently at capacity but the contribution that can be secured will help increase the frequency and capacity making this an option for residents improving public transport links and pedestrian/cycle routes.

Reading Borough Council officers will therefore continue to monitor proceedings; assist and respond to queries from local councillors and third parties; and seek to ensure the appropriate mitigation measures are secured if the appeal is allowed.

2. Julian Ansell to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Tree Planting by Developers

Could the lead member for planning confirm that he will advocate, following the lead from Wycombe Council, to require developers to plant enough trees so their canopies cover at least 25% of the land on any new estate ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Ansell for his question.

I should make clear that Wycombe Council's policy to secure a future tree canopy cover of at least 25% of the site area applies to development sites outside of the town centres and of 0.5HA or more.

Their policy DM34 states as follows:

In all cases, development is required as a minimum to:

- (a) Secure adequate buffers to valuable habitats;*
- (b) Achieve a future canopy cover of at least 25% of the site area on sites outside of the town centres and 0.5HA or more;*
- (c) Within town centres and on sites below 0.5HA development is required to maximise the opportunities available for canopy cover (including not only tree planting but also the use of green roofs and green walls);*
- (d) Make provision for the long term management and maintenance of green infrastructure;*
- (e) Protect trees to be retained through site layout and during construction.*

Given the urban nature of Reading Borough, it is reasonable to suggest that this figure of 25% is not achievable on the majority of our development sites. If Reading were to adopt an identical policy to Wycombe it would have very limited application, as so many of the sites that will contribute to Reading's housing supply are in the town centre or of a small size. Officers estimate that there would be around 15 sites in Reading over the plan period to which such a policy would in theory apply.

Whilst the percentage of required tree planting is not stated in Reading Borough Council's current or emerging Local Plan, we are committed to achieving the objectives of the Council's adopted Tree Strategy. One of the aims of Objective 2 is: *Maintaining and*

increasing canopy cover in the Borough by 10% in the period up to 2030. Objective 6 requires new developments to contribute to the objectives of the Tree Strategy.

Within Reading Borough, trees are regularly protected through the service of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) where good quality trees are threatened by development. Tree planting is actively sought on all developments as a default position, with reference to the objectives of our policies and Tree Strategy, with this being a requirement on 'treed corridors' and areas of '10% or less canopy cover area', as defined in the Strategy, as these are priority areas for tree planting.

In addition, the Council has an annual tree planting budget ensuring numerous trees are planted across the Borough every year in line with our Tree Strategy objectives. Over the last three years over 500 new trees have been planted in the Council's housing estates, schools and parks with the breakdown as follows:

Tree planting by the Council 2015-16

Highways	94
Housing	10
Parks	38
Schools	3
Total:	145

Tree planting by the Council 2016-17

Highways	95
Housing	14
Parks	32
Schools	20
Total:	161

Tree planting by the Council 2017-18

Highways	156
Housing	40
Parks	46
Total:	242

Over recent years, the Borough has seen a number of large developments implemented, such as the former Elvian School site on Bath Road, the former DEFRA site in Coley, Worton Grange (Imperial Way), the Tesco warehouse (A33), and the former Thames Water Reservoir on Bath Road, (which won an award). In all cases, TPOs were put in place to protect trees during planning discussions, and landscaping was secured to ensure the delivery of substantial tree planting.

3. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

Sports Forum

The former Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport, and Consumer Services indicated support for reconvening the Council's Sports Forum to allow a route for consultation with the Borough's sports groups and leisure centre users.

The Council has now begun the process of privatising its sports and leisure service, and the sports community would welcome the opportunity to feed into and receive feedback about this process.

Do you intend to reactivate the Sports Forum and if so, when can we expect the first meeting of the new Forum to take place ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr Burt. Firstly I would like to point out that we are outsourcing rather than privatising the development and management of our leisure facilities in order to facilitate a significant uplift in quality and to ensure that they are affordable and sustainable for the long-term.

Secondly, I do indeed support the re-establishment of the Sports Forum, not only as a vehicle for consultation but also as an ongoing partnership to promote physical activity and well-being and potentially to lever in additional investment for linked activity and facilities. The Council has already commenced consultation with a range of stakeholders to feed into the leisure procurement process and I would welcome building on this to re-establish a Sports (or sports and physical activity) Forum for Reading. I have requested that officers canvas stakeholders for interest in, and support for, attending such a forum and if this is forthcoming I would look to have an initial meeting as quickly as possible.

4. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
New 50m Swimming Pool

The Council recently announced plans to build a new secondary school at Rivermead. Would construction of the new school allow sufficient space remaining to also construct a new 50 metre swimming pool on the Rivermead site - and roughly where ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr. Lightfoot. Whilst detailed work on the new secondary school is yet to take place I am confident that the school and leisure proposals can both be accommodated. Indeed I can think of potential for them to be complimentary.

The land to be occupied by the school, which is to the west of the established full-size artificial outdoor football and hockey pitch that is likely to be retained, was not being considered for the new indoor leisure facilities. Prior to the emergence of the requirement for a new secondary school it was the intention to develop a high ropes facility on this site but the Council has now had to forego this proposal. I believe there is more than enough space on the existing Rivermead site and adjacent land and car parking to the east to accommodate a 50m pool should this be proposed by the operators bidding for the new leisure contract. This could be achieved either by substantial re-modelling of the existing facilities or a complete new build.

5. Anne Jessel to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
New 50m Swimming Pool

The former Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport, and Consumer Services has informally indicated that the Council would be open to allowing bidders for the contract to outsource the Council's leisure centres to tender to construct a new 50 metre pool in the Borough if they wish to do so.

(1) Do you support this position ?

- (2) Will you also allow bidders to tender to refurbish and reopen Arthur Hill Pool if they wish to do so ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Ms Jessel or rather two linked questions.

On the first the short answer is 'yes'. We are providing flexibility for those bidding for the leisure contract to develop the best possible set of proposals whilst meeting the Council's affordability criteria. Should a bidder consider and demonstrate that a 50m pool provides the best and most affordable solution then we would be more than happy, and I really do mean more than happy, to accept that proposal.

On the second question the equally short answer is 'no'. Arthur Hill pool has been closed and declared 'surplus to requirements' and is currently being disposed of in accordance with the decision taken by Policy Committee. The site will not therefore form part of the new leisure contract.

6. WITHDRAWN

7. Tamzin Morphy to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
East Reading MRT

At a recent planning meeting, the applicant, acting for the Council, couldn't tell the committee the minimum number of trees, due to be felled for the East Reading MRT scheme. The number has always been available in the application itself, where all trees with 75 mm stem diameter, measured at 1.5 m, are surveyed and counted. While it is true that some tree groups are to be partially felled and the number of trees to be felled within those groups is not provided, it has always been possible to calculate the minimum number of trees to be felled. The tree count column in the Tree Survey just needed to be totalled with the partial groups then subtracted from the total giving a minimum number.

Councillor Page has previously said that it is just 86 trees that will be felled in total. Could the Deputy Leader of the Council now tell us the correct number, ideally the total, but failing that the minimum number of trees that will be felled ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

The East Reading MRT scheme will provide a fast-track public transport, pedestrian and cycle route in East Reading. Full details of the scheme, including the survey of existing tree features to be removed and retained, alongside proposals for replacement planting, have been publicly available on the Council's Planning Portal website.

The classification of individual trees and tree groups is set out in the tree survey as part of the planning documentation. The survey was undertaken by a fully qualified, experienced arboricultural consultant in line with the industry standards and guidelines for surveying trees in groups. These guidelines reflect the fact that many of the tree groups are formed of dense vegetation of natural regeneration and/or young trees, therefore the value in most groups is not the individual trees, but the combined cohesive arboricultural tree feature. Where

individual trees of merit were identified within groups, they were recorded as individual trees in the survey rather than as part of the tree group.

The original proposal for the scheme included the removal of 83 tree features, consisting of 53 individual trees and 30 tree groups. The scheme was subsequently revised and the updated scheme that the Planning Applications Committee resolved to grant planning consent for involves the removal of 58 tree features, consisting of 36 individual trees and 22 tree groups (including 9 partially removed groups). Therefore, an additional 17 trees and 8 tree groups will be retained in comparison to the previous scheme.

The total canopy cover of tree groups to be removed has been calculated as 0.116 hectare, in comparison to 0.17 hectare of new understorey and hedgerow planting as part of the scheme, plus the enhancement of 3.65 hectares of existing woodland and scrub habitat.

As stated at the Planning Applications Committee meeting, the arboricultural consultant has estimated that if all trees (defined as a minimum of 75 mm stem diameter, measured at 1.5 meter above ground level) within tree groups are identified as individual trees, the total number to be removed would be approximately 750 (based on estimated numbers within the tree survey). However, the vast majority of trees in tree groups that will need to be removed are low quality, low life expectancy and/or young small trees, including many which are regenerated.

In summary, 81 new trees and 0.17 hectare of understory and hedgerow planting will be provided through the scheme, in comparison to 36 individual trees of merit and 0.116 hectare of tree group canopy to be removed. These figures reflect the fact that 0.0562 hectares of canopy cover have recently been removed independently by existing landowners that would have needed to be removed as part of the MRT scheme. All existing high quality (Category A) trees will be retained within the site, and the scheme will include the enhancement of 3.65 hectares of existing woodland and scrub habitat through the removal of invasive non-native species, selective tree management and native understorey planting to improve the quality and growth of the existing woodland in the area.

8. Veronica Leeke to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Gladman Developments

On 9th April a Statement of Common Ground in relation to the current planning appeal for 245 houses on land bordering Emmer Green in South Oxfordshire was agreed and signed between Reading Borough Council and Gladman Developments. This Statement of Common Ground does imply that if Gladman Developments make some improvements to Public Transport then Reading Borough Council agree that the location is considered sustainable i.e. it is appropriate for development. This Statement of Common Ground was agreed despite the fact that RBC Planning has objected to the application on various grounds including the fact that the Thames bridges are already at capacity and even with extra bus provision there is no available extra road space on which to accommodate more buses. Can the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport please clarify the position and explain why such a Statement of Common Ground was agreed and signed ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Ms Leeke for her question and would refer her to the earlier answer I gave this evening to the question from Mr Teer, a copy of which is attached.

I would also advise her that Paragraph 7 of this Statement of Common Ground sets out that the site would be deemed sustainable in transport terms subject to the improvements being secured and the contribution towards the improved bus provision. This view was taken in assessing the proposed development against the National Planning Policy Framework and in particular to paras 35 and 36.

Given that alternative travel options would be available for any future residents of the development it has been determined that site would be sustainable in transport terms, subject to the offsite measures being secured through the Unilateral Undertaking.