

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.2 the following question has been submitted to the Council from a member of the public, Mathew Skinner:

“Why is it that not all trees and open spaces in Beacon Ward matter to Newark & Sherwood District Council?”

Land East of Newark – known locally as the area around ‘Clay Lane’ continues to be included and allocated for housing development with no justification. As local residents, we feel that this area is not suitable for development due to unsuitability of the designated access roads and the enormous negative impact it would have environmentally. And at a time when we see large amounts of housing being delivered in other areas of the town, we see no reason why this area continues to be included in the Council’s Allocations and Development Management DPD.

In recent weeks a significant number of trees on Sherwood Avenue Play Park have been removed without the prior consent of the landowner (Newark Town Council controlled by Independents for Newark) by Newark and Sherwood District Council after being appointed as the contractor for the park redevelopments. The site is within the conservation area for Newark. Why was it decided that its ok for these trees to be removed?

Reply from Councillor Matthew Spoor - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Economic Development

I think I need to clarify that our SUEs (Strategic Urban Expansion Sites) will be reviewed regularly, but are linked directly to our Core Strategy (or Part 1 of our Dev Plan) which is in place until 2033. This builds on the strategy of 2011 which included the SHELAA (of 2010) (strategic housing and employment land availability assessment), which recognised the need to allocate land for urban expansion in the area.

In the current Core strategy these objectives are set out in NA 01 and NA03. These link to Area Policy sections 6.1 to 6.9 and 6.32 to 6.40 which outline that “the growth of Newark is fundamental to a successful Local Development Framework and the proper planning of the area. To meet our housing requirements Spatial Policy 5 allocates Strategic Sites as Sustainable Urban Extensions to the Newark Urban area.”

The Land East of Newark being one of the three sites identified. NAP 2.B sets out the requirements of any development on the site. Specifically, Requirement C 6 and 8 set out expectations for environmental protection.

The Newark Strategic Sites are not routinely part of the Allocations & Development Management Plan. The Land East of Newark is NOT proposed for allocation in the proposed Draft Allocations and Development Management DPD – completed under this administration - which is now with the Planning Inspector for Examination later this year.

However, the core strategy was adopted by the previous administration in 2019. So, the fact of the matter is that this site is already allocated given the Core Strategy which was amended in 2019 under the previous administration.

It remains in the hands of the landowners whether they wish to pursue the development of this site. Any application would still need to address up-to-date planning policies relating to open space provision and Biodiversity Net Gain, the latter being a new important requirement since the sites allocation.

This site, along with any others where progress has not been made, will be reviewed as part of the next stage of the Council's Development Plan review process, which will start in 2025, assuming the aforementioned Allocations DPD is examined and adopted by the end of this year.

As part of this process, and subject to housing needs, the Council will look to de-allocate land which has not come forward for development.

Reply from Councillor Emma Oldham – Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity & Environmental Services

Newark Town Council is the owner of Sherwood Avenue Park, following the devolution agreement between the Town and District Councils. Newark and Sherwood District Council maintain the park on behalf of the Town Council under a Service Level Agreement.

As part of those arrangements, the district council was approached by the Town in December 2022, about support we could give to reinvigorate the park and to look at funding opportunities that may be available to support any future development.

In 2023, with support from both councils, significant engagement took place with park users, schools and residents to understand what they thought about the park and how they would like it to develop.

Through this process, it became apparent that the park had become the brunt of Anti-Social Behaviour, heavy vandalism, drug use and drug hiding over the last few years. This was a burden the community wanted to see addressed within this development.

All the plans have therefore been designed with input from police colleagues to design out crime. Therefore shrubbery, *not hedgerow*, has been removed along the park borders to enable better views into the park and to improve sight lines for passers-by, cars and local residents.

The planned removal of a select few silver birch trees was included to ensure that the improved CCTV that will be installed will have a full view of the park to keep users safe and improve feelings of safety.

There is very little point in both councils investing so much into the park, for it to succumb to past issues, ongoing damages and reoccurring vandalism and users feeling unsafe and intimidated.

We've been fully transparent with this police report, which has been shared with the Town Council. All of our plans have also been heavily promoted on both our website, Facebook and with the press. The leader of the Town council has also been involved in meetings and site visits to discuss the plans in detail. Neither the clerk nor any Town Cllrs sent it any concerns or challenges on these plans.

The works have progressed in line with the work NSDC undertakes on behalf of the Town Council through the Service Level Agreement and have been carried out now to avoid nesting season.

Furthermore, you will see in the plans, there is also an exciting new nature area alongside new, sustainable-sized trees which will create an avenue for a new zip line, as well as the planting of grasses and wildflowers which will be specially planted for pollinators and hold a much higher biodiversity value.

Throughout the whole engagement process, which has included many online and in-person surveys, we have not received a single concern or complaint from a wildlife or tree perspective, however, many have expressed concerns about future-proofing the park by designing out crime and ASB and providing the best possible coverage for CCTV.

Overall, there will be more biodiversity and greenery on site, whilst balancing many more needs and desires of our community. This will be a vibrant and wonderful asset right in the heart of Newark and will be well worth the wait once complete.

Supplemental Question from Mathew Skinner

You are keen environmentalists as a Council, so can I ask, why is it and what was it about these approximately 12-15 trees that did not matter?

Reply from Councillor Emma Oldham – Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity & Environmental Services

I believe I have already answered the question as to the reason why the trees were removed and we are going to be putting in new trees. The trees that have come down are being retained on the site. They hold value for the site so they are going to be installed as part of the new nature zone we referred to, so the logs are going to be used to create habitats. We will create new habitats for new wildlife like rotting decaying wood, because actually there is significant habitat that we are losing in town centres, so all of those trees will either be repurposed in the footpaths or in the nature zone. We are planting new significantly sized trees and overall we will have more biodiversity value, more species planted and these will be pollinators because a lot of the trees and shrubbery on site did not really have much value to nature. I am very confident and trust our team and the plans that we will have a good balance for nature and residents.