

**FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 21 OCTOBER 2025**

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

**In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.2 the following question was submitted to the Council from Mr Laurence Goff:**

Empty Properties – Why did it take so long?

For many years Newark and Sherwood has had empty buildings not being protected, empty properties, often commercial buildings.

Work is set to take place to transform the historic 300-year-old Ollerton Hall that has stood vacant for 50 years. It now has planning permission to turn them into apartments. The Robin Hood Hotel in Newark, a landmark building, stood derelict for over two decades after its closure in 1999 before being transformed into a Travelodge hotel.

The Lilley and Stone School, Newark has stood empty for 9 years; Woods Court former care home is empty; the Oaks and Little Oaks Care Home, 172 London Road, Balderton, Newark is also standing empty. The Corn Exchange, Newark stood empty for years which is now a night club, located in the Town Centre.

The question is why they did not have someone to live in to safeguard the properties in the first place? It would be good to setup a Guardianship to safeguard our properties across the District.

An empty property guardianship offers the best solution where an individual lives in and protects vacant properties, at a lower cost than traditional renting, while the property owner benefits from security and reduced risks. Guardians secure the property, preventing issues like squatters, anti-social behaviour and vandalism, and often enjoy more affordable, flexible living arrangements. Not only do property owners benefit from having their vacant buildings protected, but guardians pay lower rent than market rates in exchange for maintaining the property and ensuring its security.

**Reply from Councillor Claire Penny – Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Economic Development**

Thank you, Laurence. I really appreciate the thoughtful question.

Like you, I absolutely share the frustration of residents when buildings sit empty for years, whether that's heritage assets, missed housing or social opportunities. Some cases like Ollerton Hall, or former schools have been tied up in private ownership, complex planning, or viability challenges, but I'm proud to say our teams have made real progress in this.

The Council has intervened in some cases with examples including:

Ollerton Hall, vacant for over 50 years, is now nearing completion with brand new apartments. 32 Stodman Street, in Newark, is now being redeveloped into high-quality

homes and retail and 14 Market Place, a long-standing empty unit, is being brought back into use as part of our efforts to support independent businesses in the town centre.

Unfortunately, our resources are finite and we cannot intervene in all cases.

Your idea about property guardianship is genuinely interesting and it can work well in certain contexts, though it does come with some legal and safeguarding considerations. Importantly it also requires a willing and present landowner. For many long-term empty buildings, the reasons are often complex, sometimes involving absentee owners.

I'm happy for officers to actively explore the idea and to look at examples elsewhere where it's worked well.

### **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.3 the following question was submitted to the Council from Councillor John Lee:**

During the last election, the Independents for Newark & District set out a number of manifesto commitments. Residents reasonably expect clarity on whether those commitments are being delivered within the current term.

For example:

1. Housing and Green Space – The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme consultation (Sept 2024) confirmed that demand for homes continues to outstrip supply. In addition, 142 homes were approved on Lowfield Lane, Balderton, land that residents had previously understood would be protected. ([Newark Advertiser, 2024]).
2. Climate Change – The Council has reported a 26% reduction in carbon emissions from its own buildings and operations ([Newark Advertiser, Sept 2025]), but there is no published timetable showing how the wider district will move towards the pledged 2035 net zero target.
3. Health and Wellbeing – While community events have been delivered, there is no published evidence demonstrating improvements in life expectancy or reduced health inequalities.
4. Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour – Nottinghamshire Police figures show shoplifting increased by 21% and burglary by 9% in 2024 compared to the previous year. Overall crime stood at 6,834 incidents per 100,000 people in the year to Sept 2023. ([Notts Police, Jan 2025]; [Varbes, 2023])

Given these published figures, will the Deputy Leader confirm when each of these manifesto pledges will be fully met, or whether she accepts that they will not be met within the lifetime of this administration?

### **Reply from Councillor Rowan Cozens – Deputy Leader of the Council**

Thank you, Councillor Lee, for your question and the opportunity to celebrate some fantastic achievements. Independents for Newark & District are not a political party but a group of local people who as Councillors represent and speak for the communities they live in. We were elected because people wanted change, particularly at the local level. We are

completely self-funded. As a group we have been instrumental in pursuing a respectful and collaborative approach to local politics and have had a big impact not only at District, but also on Parish and Town Councils. We are proud to work cross-party with our colleagues at the District Council.

Each quarter, progress against the Council's priorities and actions are reported to the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee and then to Cabinet. You can track progress being made. Here are a few headline examples for you. Over £500,000 has been invested in de-carbonising our Council homes; new and replacement gym equipment has been installed in all of our leisure centres; we've rolled out a programme of solar panels to Council owned facilities; we've delivered a programme of parks improvements and a pilot scheme of Green Gateways; we've delivered a new changing places style facility at the Dukeries Leisure Centre to improve access for people with disabilities; we've completed the construction of a new car park at Newark hospital to enable more services previously provided at Kings Mill to be offered at Newark; we've developed the Playing Pitch strategy and set aside £2.5million to improve local sports pitches; construction of the fantastic new Alexander Lodge facility for homeless people has been completed; various Safer Streets and other community safety initiatives have been delivered and not forgetting the brand new CCTV control room; and of course I was particularly delighted that the King's representative in Nottinghamshire chose to attend the opening and unveil our new Kidney sculptures.

You'll be pleased to know that plenty more is in the pipeline – including a new programme of Council house building; planning permission will shortly be submitted for our multi-million regeneration scheme for Ollerton town centre; the re-development of Stodman Street will complete next year; excellent progress is being made to deliver our new and green industrial park at Clipstone and building on the pilot Green Gateways initiative, where previously overlooked verges have been brought to life with wildflowers, attracting bees and butterflies, we're committed to delivering up to five new Green Gateway sites each year.

I am very pleased and proud to be part of a group of Councillors who jointly achieve so much for their residents.

**In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.3 the following question was submitted to the Council from Councillor Neil Allen:**

With the Policy and Performance Improvement Committee's annual report having just been published does this report reflect the findings of the recent peer review?

And in particular the recommendations to improve scrutiny and flexibility in regard to: - Working groups; the shaping of policy and strategy; driving service improvement; and scrutiny and allowing flexibility in regard to allowing Councillors to question performance.

**Reply from Councillor Mike Pringle – Chair of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee**

Thank you for your question, Cllr Allen and for bringing to the attention of Council the excellent work the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee has delivered over the past year. I fully recommend the report to anyone wants to see what a wide range of work the Committee undertakes.

You are correct, the Council's recent LGA peer review included general recommendations aimed at improving Council committee structures and enhancing scrutiny.

The Council has reviewed and updated Committee terms and structures with the recommendations in mind, forming the Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee for example, including appointing opposition Councillors as Chair and Vice Chair. And providing Audit & Accounts as a separate Committee. In fact, I believe you are Vice Chair of that Committee.

Additional recommendations on methods of scrutiny were addressed through our annual training for the Committee in March. Which I think I remember you attended. However, as you will have seen through the annual report a system that supported working groups and questions from Committee members already exists. I believe you have been a member of three working groups so far and are indeed going to be joining a fourth one shortly.

We regularly welcome Members to the Cabinet to answer questions put by Policy & Performance Improvement Committee as an informative form of scrutiny.

The PPI Committee's annual report does not reference the peer review recommendations directly, as these were received after the report period. The report looks backwards at the previous year's work. You will see it mentioned in next year's report and will keep a brief of this, however the peer challenge team are due back with us in a few weeks to check on our progress. I'm sure they will be very happy with how we have built on our excellent work and will look forward to receiving their update going directly to Cabinet and for further discussion.

#### **Supplemental Question from Councillor Allen**

On 1 September myself and Councillor Harris both put forward a topic request for a review of the heritage and cultural spending. As proposer and seconder we had hoped we would be able to lead on that working group however, we were told that as substitutes we were unable to do that and that the Constitution says that as substitutes we cannot take part.

The Constitution says that most working groups should be chaired by the Chair or Vice Chair of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee. This is not usually the case, I think it's only once that the Vice Chair has chaired a working group. I have checked the Constitution about chairing working groups, it does not say that substitutes cannot chair a working group.

I am asking for reassurance that in the future, substitutes on scrutiny can happen at the Council and that there's confidence that as substitutes we can join working groups and lead those working groups.

#### **Reply from Councillor Mike Pringle – Chair of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee**

I agree and if a Councillor takes the time to actually put a topic request form in and have obviously looked at the detailed history of that they should be included in presenting that to committee, so I'm happy to take this up and seek advice.