

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Question from Jane Olson

Proposed Development of The Stadium, Elm Avenue, Newark

We are all aware of how urban green space is an essential part of urban infrastructure and vital to the wellbeing of the community it serves. This planning application aims to squeeze more housing into an area already struggling with deficiencies in green space allocation. In previous conversations with Council representatives residents from Elm Avenue and surround have been directed towards the undeniably comprehensive facilities to be provided by the YMCA Sports Village. However, these facilities will not be free, available only to those children whose families can afford to use them. Are the elected councillors satisfied that they are adequately acting as agents of the existing residents of the Elm Avenue and surrounding area, in providing accessible, and most importantly, free to use green space for their children to play on within a safe walking distance of their homes? Furthermore, would the District Council be willing to undertake a more tempered assessment of the current green infrastructure deficiencies of the area in their Neighbourhood Plan, before giving the go ahead to the loss of what has the potential to be a huge community asset?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

Thank you for the question. The specific issues will be picked up when discussing the petition to be presented later on the agenda. However you raise the specific query with regard to assessing green space and, as you know from my comment at Newark Town Council, we will be taking forward a Green Spaces Strategy which will cover the issues raised. I must point out that you refer to a Neighbourhood Plan for Newark but that Parish had not developed one.

There was no supplemental question, however Councillor Lloyd covered issues in respect of the Elm Avenue site when he was advised that the lead petitioner was not able to attend this meeting to present.

This question gives me the opportunity to address some inaccuracies circulated. There is reference to legacy and legal covenants but none can be found despite an exhaustive search. It was suggested the land was chained up and sale prices elevated as nobody would use it which is not an allegation that can be made of the District Council. The space was used for football but has not been for a long time and given it is fenced off the land cannot be described as informal green open space. The proposal to bring forward for housing was not the District Council or the YMCA but a different organisation which had identified the land for building 23 houses. The County Council were looking to sell this land which was where the District Council became involved. Correspondence I received from Sport England advised that these were not high quality facilities which were being not being used. The District therefore sought to lever with the County Council the proceeds from the sale to be directly

reinvested in the YMCA project. This consultation was successful which secured a community dividend.

As the Ward Member I did not wish to see 23 houses on this site. Some residents were content with 9 or 11 units with some content that the proceeds would be reinvested. It is suggested that the YMCA facility will not be free to use. This is the case but the YMCA philosophy is to work through bursaries and social schemes to make the facilities accessible to all. The YMCA project will deliver first class national facilities. This will bring in others such as universities which only enhance social mobility and enhance livelihoods of those in the District. Within the scheme we have increased access to Sustrans route to open up access to other parks and open spaces and we are committed to upgrading all the sports facilities throughout the District. This proposal addresses the issues raised in this question in respect of social mobility, sporting opportunity, children's free space, economic wellbeing and investing in the future. In respect of the green agenda, to say that any area of space would be protected would be a dishonesty to the public. The Council must make a balanced decision on such issues.

2. Question from Paul Moore

Have any Councillors been admonished, censured, disciplined or reprimanded in the last 10 years?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

Such is the lexicography and avenues for misinterpretation that I am hesitant to answer without proper caveat. Have there been complaints about District Councillors that have led to formal investigations and disciplinary action in the last ten years, no. That, I believe addressed the questions of censure or discipline. Have any Councillors been admonished or reprimanded? Without clarity from Mr Moore, who is not in attendance, I can only say that all organisations have occasion whereupon it is necessary to challenge people's performance, attitudes or behaviours and Councillors and Officers are no different. One person might interpret a quiet word as a reprimand, another would see it as coaching, another as constructive criticism. Therefore, I am compelled to answer, quite probably.

3. Question from Liz Lainé

Last week the UK Government's own Committee on Climate Change reported 'a substantial gap between current plans and future requirements and an even greater shortfall in action'. One of its four core recommendations was that the Government 'fully engage the public in the UK's net-zero transition'. Do the Councillors agree that the clearest way to communicate the scale of the challenge is to join Parliament and the 120 first and second tier Councils who have so far declared a climate emergency, as proposed by this motion? If not, how are they fully engaging the public in the UK's net-zero transition?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

This question would be answered by the motion later on the agenda, as to whether we join the declaration. As your question indicates, you are aware of the motion.

Supplementary question from Liz Lainé

The Home Energy Conservation Act reporting for 2019 relies upon a partnership which is no longer in place. What will replace this?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

This will be reviewed.

4. Question from Donna Bowyer & Max Crow (and Roger Bell)

We are representing the newly-formed Extinction Rebellion Newark and Sherwood, which wants Governments to tell the truth about the Climate Emergency, act on it, and do so using Citizens Assemblies to ensure decisions are made in a transparent and inclusive way. I therefore support this motion and my question is, what is the current carbon emissions target that guides NSDC decision-making in terms of scale and speed, and what is that target's scientific basis?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

Another question referring to the motion later on the agenda. The questioners indicate support for the motion and therefore presumably already know that there are no proposals for citizens assemblies. Similarly, the motion proposes setting measures which clearly infers that there is no current target.

5. Question from Elena Stardust

How as a local council can you continue to build cheap housing on brown field sites, pulling up trees, taking away green spaces for children and families to play on, continue to watch as our air quality depletes due to the major roads and factories that surround Newark. How can you watch as residents tackle respiratory issues, cancers, obesity problems due to the poor quality of food from industrialised farming? How can you sleep when the people you are here to support and to protect, are being poisoned by the money making, planet killing system that has caused the largest percentage of the emissions we see in our planet today? So I write to you to plead my final statement...for the future of the children who are not able to vote, but will feel the biggest burden of our decisions today.....a climate emergency must be push through, we need a change in the system and the policies around it, to ensure a low carbon and sustainable future. A future of fairness, not to just the 10% richest, but to us all.

It is an issue of social and economic justice as well as ecological justice. Life of every person and creature on this earth depends on this.

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

I cannot be anything but perplexed and disappointed by the extent of hyperbole in this question and the caustic inferences on all in this room. In turn: Cheap housing on brownfield sites is the preference for expensive houses on greenfield sites? As a Council, and social housing provider with a waiting list exceeding 2000, I will defend absolutely building affordable and social housing in proximity to schools, amenities and transport links. Pulling up trees. The minute of the last meeting addresses this. We have not, indeed we have planted over 600 and safeguarded trees at risk. Green spaces are addresses in later debate and in my answer to the first question. Air quality due to roads and factories. I have an empathy but we are not the highways authority nor Highways England. I would not pretend that any polluting industries do not exist but all standards are met and cannot be varied until national laws are varied. Meantime, we will protect jobs and livelihoods and encourage positive action.

I do not watch residents with the conditions you list and a greater knowledge of myself and colleagues would evidence how derogatory this remark is. However, for completeness we are not the Food Standards Agency or EU and do not have legislative powers to vary food production. Similar comment pertains to being asked how I sleep. To lay the largest percentage of emissions in our planet at our door is an exaggeration of our powers, duties and influence. The questioner pleads for a climate emergency, the later motion addresses this and that component has cross party support. Then there is reference to the 10% richest with an inference that they are our concern. As an Authority focussed on jobs, income, welfare support, fuel poverty, social housing, assisting asylum seekers, combatting homelessness, improving transport links, expanding biodiversity, ensuring standards in food and drink premises, protecting rural communities, leveraging investment into utilities and infrastructures, improving recycling rates, making communities cleaner, safer and greener. As that authority and one that evidences delivery and improvement, I rather think we work for everyone in this District without prejudice, bias or dogma.

Supplementary question from Elena Stardust

Is the Council considering a park and ride scheme to address traffic congestion in Newark?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

The District Council recognise the problem of traffic congestion in Newark and have tailored car parking charges and made infrastructure investments such as the inner ring road to address this, however it is the County Council who would need to propose such a scheme.

6. Question from Esther Cropper

Are you prepared to accept that the time to make bold decisions to mitigate climate change is now, and if so, will you look back at some of your recent decisions and longer term development plans with this in mind and make changes to this end?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

I am, the later motion will evidence this. The question is not specific to which decisions, or by whom. To that extent it is improper if I answer. Longer term plans do take climate change into account and following tonight's motion, will do so even more.

Supplementary question from Esther Cropper

Is Newark & Sherwood District Council prepared to take bold decisions beyond government recommendations?

Reply from Councillor D. Lloyd – Leader of the Council

I cannot give an affirmative yes as we have to work within our legal and cost parameters. However, we will continue to work with others, including parishes, to lobby government. We are already providing electric car charging points and we will continue to do more within the spending parcel available.