

COUNCIL – 20 DECEMBER 2011

Agenda item 7 - Questions

a) Questions asked by Councillor DM Taylor and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Can the Leader remind the Council what the proposals were for the Argents Mead area in the Masterplan published by the previous administration in 2006?”

Response from Councillor SL Bray

“Thank you Cllr Taylor for your question.

I would refer you to an extract of the adopted Hinckley Town Centre Renaissance Masterplan published in May 2006. As you will see, extensive development was proposed. Two plans are attached.”

b) Question asked by Councillor MS Hulbert and addressed to the Leader of Council

“A lot has been said in the Chamber and local press about the consultation that has taken place over the Barwell and Earl Shilton SUE’s. Could the Leader put on record all the consultation that has taken place for the benefit of all Members, some of which appear to have missed it!”

Response from Councillor SL Bray

“You will recall at last Council, I highlighted the extensive consultation that has been carried out on the SUE’s for Barwell and Earl Shilton. For the avoidance of doubt, I have listed below the details of the consultation exercises which demonstrate the ongoing and extensive nature of consultation carried out to date. You will also be aware the Developers are planning further consultation early in the New Year, as well as a presentation to Scrutiny Commission.

Public Consultation Stages – Earl Shilton and Barwell SUEs/AAP

Masterplan

- Pre-commencement consultation (July to September 2008)
 - (Lanarca working with Earl Shilton Town Council, Barwell Parish Council, Hinckley & Bosworth LSP and HBBC)
 - Information provided (Barwell Carnival and Earl Shilton Egyptian Day)
 - Website updates
 - Information boards
 - Letter and information pack to Citizens Panel
 - Members briefings
 - Workshops with strategic partners
 - Press release
 - Public exhibitions and Community workshop (Barwell Parish Council on Saturday 20 September 2008 and Earl Shilton Methodist Church on Saturday 27 September 2008)
- Masterplan Options Consultation (from July 2009 to March 2010)
 - Stakeholder Workshop – July 2009

- Leaflets distributed to all addresses in Earl Shilton and Barwell regarding the SUEs and consultation and associated events
 - Posters displayed in key locations in Earl Shilton and Barwell
 - Borough Bulletin article
 - Exhibition material and comments forms available on the HBBC website
 - Masterplan Options consultation in Barwell 4th and 5th December 2009
 - Masterplan Options consultation in Earl Shilton 11th and 12th December 2009
 - Stakeholder Design Workshop – 2nd and 3rd March 2010
- Masterplan Preferred Options Consultation (October 2010)
 - Borough Bulletin article
 - Posters in key locations
 - Local radio coverage
 - Email as and flyers to stakeholders
 - Public exhibitions in Barwell on 8th and 9th October 2010
 - Public exhibitions in Earl Shilton on 15th and 16th October 2010
- Earl Shilton and Barwell Area Action Plan – Preferred Options Consultation (January and February 2011)
 - 6 week statutory public consultation allowing the submission of representations (7th January 2011 until 18th February 2011)
 - Letters sent to all contacts on HBBC’s planning policy database
 - Letters to all residential and business addresses in Earl Shilton and Barwell providing an invitation to attend the consultation events, where the proposals can be viewed and the opportunity to submit comments as part of the formal AAP preparation process.
 - Press release to Hinckley Times and Leicester Mercury. Information provided to Parish and Town Council for inclusion in their newsletters
 - Public exhibitions in Barwell on 14th and 15th January 2011
 - Public exhibitions in Earl Shilton on 7th and 8th January 2011
 - Documents made available at main libraries in the Borough, the main council offices and on the HBBC website.”

c) Questions asked by Councillor MS Hulbert and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Can the Leader inform the Council how much Leicestershire County Council is planning to spend of its £5M Sustainable Transport Allocation, which it has bid to central government for on Hinckley & Bosworth?”

Response from Mr SL Bray

“Leicestershire County Council have advised that its bid for £5M Local Sustainable Transport Fund will be focussed on Loughborough and Coalville. Hinckley & Bosworth are unlikely to see any of this funding invested in the locality. The County will start to investigate the second tranche of potential area based schemes in the next financial year (2012/13) and I will wish to be making a strong pitch for this Borough to be included as a priority due to the transport issues we experience and to gain commitment for this resource to support our regeneration initiatives.”

d) Question asked by Councillor DM Gould and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Could the Executive Member for the Local Strategic Partnership tell me what impact he thinks the electrification of the Midland Main Line near our Borough would have on

our Businesses, and how such a scheme would interact with our projected growth in apprenticeships and employment opportunities?”

Response from Mr DC Bill

“Thank you Cllr Gould for your question. As you will be aware, Network Rail propose to upgrade the Midland Mainline running between London and Sheffield via Leicester, Derby and Nottingham through its national electrification programme. As well as key benefits for passengers, in terms of faster and more frequent services, this also presents the opportunity for the rail operators to shift from diesel operated locomotives to more environmentally friendly electric trains which will produce up to 30% less CO2 emissions. This also offers an opportunity for many of our local businesses and those employed in the locality to have better access to an improved national network from Hinckley. I am pleased to confirm through the work of the Local Employment and Skills Partnership, that the number of apprenticeships in companies such as Caterpillar, MIRA and Triumph are increasing and any major improvement in the provision of public transport access in the vicinity of this Borough is to be welcomed.”

e) Question asked by Councillor JS Moore and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Could the Leader outline the rationale behind the practice of allowing former employees who have either taken earlier retirement or enhanced payments in respect of voluntary redundancy, providing consultancy services to this council?”

Additional could the leader also inform council of the sum total payments to former employees in respect of the consultancy services they have subsequently provided to the authority.”

Response from Mr SL Bray

“Thank you Councillor Bessant for your question, the rationale is simple and is on a case by case basis, having said that the number of cases is small.

The decision to accept early retirements or voluntary redundancy applications is based on a business case for the authority. The question is asked whether that post can be suitable for redistribution of responsibilities, appointment at a lower grade or indeed dispensing with the role entirely, all to make savings on the base budget. A decision to employ a consultant concerns the need for a one off piece of work with someone with specialist experience in delivery in a required area. This is to avoid ongoing staffing liabilities and is subject to contracts to deliver goods or services.

There are 3 former employees, who have left the authority by either taking early retirement or having been made redundant who have subsequently carried out consultancy work. I have considered records going back to 1998. During 2010/11 they provided £21,580 worth of consultancy work to HBBC and a further £15,805 to the Revenues and Benefits Partnership. In 2011/12 to date the value is £13,282 and a further £22,634 to the Revenues and Benefits Partnership. The work for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has been paid for by external funding provided by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, not by this Council, as it was a partnership initiative between three Councils.”

f) Question asked by Councillor PS Bessant and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Given the financial challenges that this, and all authorities are facing at this time, would the Leader please let this chamber know his Administration’s current spend on

Press Releases, especially as I noted with some dismay recently receiving 10 press releases in the space of eight days.”

Response from Mr SL Bray

“Can I thank Councillor Bessant for his question as it gives me an opportunity to highlight the amount of work which is required to ensure that the people of this Borough are kept informed of decisions and events and to ensure that they are consulted to make sure our services are accessible and responsive for all.

The costs associated with press releases are limited to a small proportion of salary costs, estimated at £4,300, made up of the time spent by two part time officers who also have responsibility for Media Relations, Graphic Design, Consultation (including the Citizens' Panel), the Council's website, the Borough Bulletin, internal communications and increasingly, social media.

Press releases are used proactively and usually in the alternative to paid for advertising space. It is a cost-effective way to ensure that every council service area provides the residents of the borough as well as the media, with accurate and up-to-date information about council services and facilities. In some cases this is necessary because of a statutory duty to inform, consult and involve local people in decision making across all public functions. In others it is to enable people to get the greatest benefit from the services available and to know what they are entitled to.

Further I am pleased to say that the Communications team now provides comms support to the Crimestoppers charity in this area and Creative Hinckley as part of our partnership working and that we are actively pursuing joint working arrangements with neighbouring councils.

Member input into press releases is desired and being included in circulation is requested by Members, I am however happy to ask officers to remove Councillor Bessant from the circulation list should he prefer it.”