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Notes on session of Question Time held on Thursday 8th November at Old Barn Hall, Church Road, at 7.30pm

Councillors: Cllr. John Chandler (Bookham South), Cllr. Clare Curran (Surrey CC for Bookham and Fetcham West), Cllr Elizabeth Daly (Bookham South), Cllr. Simon Edge (Bookham South), Cllr. Metin Huseyin (Bookham North), Cllr Richard Moyse (Bookham North), Cllr David Harper (Ashtead Park) and Emma Day (Executive Head of Service (Prosperity) at MVDC).

Residents: Too many to name

1 Introduction

The Question Time was opened by John Howarth who was going to Chair the meeting. Unfortunately, our Chairman Peter Seaward was not able to be with us this tonight as he is in St Georges Hospital in Tooting for the last 10 days. Peter Seaward sent an email to be read out "Good evening and welcome. This is the second year of this event. It is not a scripted or rehearsed event. It was it is as it says on the tin. It is your question time."

Later in the evening David Harper Councillor and Mole Valley Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Policy will talk about the Mole Valley Local Plan.

We have had a dozen questions submitted electronically during the day. We may not have time to answer them all.

2 Bookham Neighbourhood Development Plan

Question: A group of local Bookham Residents worked very hard on developing a plan from 2012 to 2017. This was to develop a local plan to guide the senior officers at Mole Valley on planning decisions that were compatible with planning policy. The development plan was reviewed by an external examiner and then put to a local referendum. The plan was then adopted by the Council. Despite this planning applications that should have been determined by reference to the Neighbourhood Development Plan have been refused because other planning policies have been weighted to have more material consideration than the NDP. This makes no sense

as the policies in the NDP would be narrower and more specific to the local area and carry more weight. There seems to be something called "material considerations" that can be used to override the NDP. This implies that "localism" can be overridden at any point and hence all the local voluntary work that went in to the plan was a waste of time.

Cllr Richard Moyses responded to the question by saying having six months of experience and having been to five Development Control Committee Meetings about 90% of the applications are dealt with by the Officers under delegated powers, which leaves 7 to 8 of applications coming to Committee. More recent applications have been approved, even though they go against the NDP, because when policies are written and published that is the date they commence and relevant. This means that if there is any later policy which is divergent, they can take precedence over the earlier policy. This I find is very frustrating. So any national plans that put together in the future will be able to take precedence over any current ones. I have asked the question that if we develop another Local Plan in the future will that take precedence over the current National Plan? No response yet. When we go to meetings we have to go with no pre-determined positions and will have visited all sites beforehand.

Cllr. Simon Edge agreed with that and said that he did not think a lot of new plans taking precedence over the NDP plans, or of using of material considerations to override NDP policies. Planners will use professional judgement to come to a decision on a particular application. We should lobby the planners and challenge senior staff to give more weight to the NDP.

Cllr. Metin Huseyin said that since the local development plan was written the national planning framework has been put in place and the local planners will take that into consideration when they make their decisions. At the moment government is looking to build more homes and hence a lot of the policies will be guided by that. And if you look at the revisions on the national policy which assesses the need in local boroughs and comes up with a figure for the 15 years which will be used by the Council in their local plan to produce these homes. If we go to appeal on a particular application and then get overruled, it makes no sense to continually go to appeal, which is a costly activity, and then lose. So after a time you get to know which appeals are likely to win and which would be a waste of time to appeal on. We will be guided by the planners who have professional knowledge of what happened before. I know it's not a great answer but you have to be realistic when there is such pressure to build more houses.

A member of the audience said that they were disappointed that the NDP, which was finally approved in May 2017, seem to be overridden in in the taking of local planning decisions.

3 Gender Pay Gap

Question: Julia Dickinson raised that an analysis of the local authorities in our region shows that Mole Valley has the biggest pay gap. My question to the panel is what action should our councillors take to redress the situation?

Emma Day responded by saying by saying that she had looked carefully at the figures and we need to understand what's driving those differences so that we can take the right corrective action. There was an interesting programme on the radio

this morning (8th November) which suggested that when women had children there was a reluctance to travel far distances to work. Was it due to the different approach to caring responsibilities by men and women? So, if women take time off to look after children when they do go back it will be quite hard for them to catch up with their previous earning potential. So, what can Mole Valley District Council do about it?

In March this year we adopted the Economic Prosperity Strategy which set out a number of priorities that we need to follow for our economic development for safeguarding our employment plans and pressure on releasing enough land for housing needs. Against this we need to have sufficient space to attract and retain high calibre employers. We also need to consider how do we develop the right skills in our area to match the employer's needs, which are often in knowledge intensive areas such as IT, national services and construction engineering. Also work experience at school level and for those returning to work after a break. The return to the work force is achieved by a short period of work experience whether paid or not. This helps to build back self-confidence.

Cllr. Clare Curran mentioned that one of the other issues for working women is the availability of child care. One of the responsibilities of the County Council is to ensure the sufficiency of child care for pre-school children. This we do by working with day nurseries, child-minders, nursery schools and early providers and the picture across the Council is quite healthy. As you know working parents can access 30 hours a week of paid for child-care. As well as that we need to ensure that our children, particularly our daughters, do as well at school as possibly they can do and that all opportunities are available to our children for them to do. We are very proud in Surrey that 96% of our schools in Surrey are rated good or outstanding. As John said I also have a portfolio for vulnerable children I am very pleased to say that one of the strengths we have is supporting teenagers into employment and education and we have the lowest, nationally, for unemployed teenagers.

Cllr. John Chandler wanted to raise the disparity between paternity leave and maternity leave. Women get months whereas the men get a couple of weeks. If this could be even up between them then women would get more of a chance to get back to work.

4 Square-about Flooding

Question: This is on Lower Road/Square-a-bout and the resident is pleased to note that the County Council has allocated £30,000 for flooding investigation this financial year. To date we haven't seen any action. When do expect the investigation to start and will the remedial action be included in next year's budget?

There is a follow-up question submitted this evening asking about a zebra crossing outside the Old Crown Public House on Lower Road. The only thing now, of course, is that we would be in danger of being drowned with the flood water.

Cllr. Clare Curran replied that we are fortunate to have £30,000 allocated to have investigative work to try and sort out that long-standing issue of standing water at the square-about when we have heavy rain. The first thing to do is to have a proper investigation with CCTV to plot the line of the drains. This will have to be done by closing one of the carriageways in the road which will cause significant traffic disruption. It will be imperative to do this in the schools' holiday. We have just

missed the current schools' holiday, so if we cannot do this at Christmas, then it will be done at the next half term in February. It must be noted that this is not a sum of money that would be lost if it's not done in this current financial year as it will be carried over. The social damage to our community of that standing water has been recognised and there is a real imperative to find out what is wrong and what should be done to fix it and what the price tag will be.

A member of the audience pointed out that it does need addressing as people queuing at the bus stop near there get drenched.

5 Square-about Precedence

A question was submitted asking would someone undertake to find out once and for all the definitive legal position for traffic approaching the square-about and seek to publicise this so that as many residents as possible finally understand it. That it is a) not a roundabout, therefore you're not required to give way to the traffic on it to your right or b) the square-about is first come first served.

Cllr. Clare Curran replied that the answer is there is no answer. There are only two square-about's in the country one in Bookham and one further north. Some years ago, a lady wrote an article on the square-about in Look Local. Perhaps we could ask the publisher to retrieve that article. That lady had done a lot of research for the article. According to the County Council's Highways Officer there is no recognised way of approaching the square-about, it is up to you. In fact the Safety Officers in the Highways Team quite like the uncertainty for all of us that we don't quite know quite what we are going to do and we also don't know what the other motorist is going to do. That uncertainty as to the safety of it.

The end result of all of this is that there is very few accidents on the square-about.

Do note that there are giveaway signs on all four entrances with broken lines and triangles so treating it as a four-way giveaway is properly the safest thing to do.

6 Pedestrian Crossing

Cllr. Simon Edge wanted to raise the issue of the refuge crossing just outside the Old Crown and the Nicolas Church. This is because many motorists are not sure if it is a pedestrian crossing and therefore, sometimes slam on the brakes if some-one is looking to cross on it. There needs to be clear signage and some publicity on what to do. In summary it is a refuge giving the chance to cross, if safe to do so, to the refuge and then wait till the road is clear to continue crossing – it is not a pedestrian crossing.

Cllr. Clare Curran there was a secondary question as to whether this could be made into a pedestrian crossing. Unfortunately, because it's so close to the square-about it doesn't meet any of the Department of Transport requirements for a pedestrian crossing. Unfortunately, it can't be a pedestrian crossing because it doesn't meet the formal requirements.

7 GP Surgeries

Over the last 20 years the population of Bookham and Fetcham have probably doubled and yet we have the same number of GP surgeries. So the question is how

can authorities of Surrey and Mole Valley put pressure on NHS England to increase the number of surgeries.

Cllr Richard Moyse responded by saying that we continually react to what developers want to do in our village. We need to be more proactive in getting developers to contribute in greater weight to the infrastructure of the village. Each month sitting in Development Control Planning meetings and dealing with another planning application which slips under the Affordable Housing square meterage or slips under some National or Regional Planning rule as each application is dealt with separately. I would like to see our Mole Valley Planning strategy which is being rewritten for the Spring. I would like to see us engage with developers much earlier on by saying if you want to do X you must contribute to Y. This similar to the development in Effingham for the Howard School where the developer had to contribute to the infrastructure.

Cllr. Metin Huseyin raised the issue that that Mole Valley had to build 6600 homes in the next 15 years and Bookham will have to take its fair share and no more than that. There are various sites that we are looking at and as part of that there will have to be a contribution to the infrastructure to support it such as Health Services.

We are looking closely at the northern part of Mole Valley and in particular the brownfield sites. We do have to work under the constraints of viability so if you tell them that 40% of the homes need to be affordable and sometimes able through their barristers and legal to argue that it will no longer be viable.

8 Notes. Compiled by Nick Forrer from notes made at the time.