

COUNCIL MEETING – 28 NOVEMBER 2018

Question 1 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Lockington

Councillor Lockington: With the 28 Electrical Vehicle Charging Points at the Crown Car Park is there any plans for providing any Electrical Vehicle Charging Points within any of the surface Car Parks owned by the Borough.

Councillor Smart: The good news is Yes. Officers are producing a plan for the introduction of Electrical Vehicle charging points to be installed across several of the Council's car parks.

Councillor Lockington: Would you confirm whether there will be any of the very fast charging points which clearly is needed for (or high charging points as they're called), which clearly is needed for some of these vehicles, and thank you for the response.

Councillor Smart: Well as to the particular type of equipment to be installed I don't have that information but I'm sure that we can ask the officers to consider that as part of their plan.

Question 2 to be put to Councillor Ross by Councillor Phillips

Councillor Phillips: As the responsible authority for Parking Enforcement can IBC ensure that it will strongly enforce the regulations across all areas of our Town?

Councillor Ross: Thank you for the question Councillor Phillips. There is a team of 13 parking enforcement officers patrolling the Town.

The Team focuses on known hot spots based on past experience, intelligence and information from the public and other agencies.

Technology like body worn video and hand held devices are used to help maintain the highest parking standards and all zones in the town are visited every week.

Councillor Phillips: Are you aware that many residents across the town have the perception and are complaining about an apparent lacklustre parking enforcement approach in certain community areas of the town, such as Norwich Road, Queens Street, Bond Street and elsewhere where they see local residents, customers and businesses allegedly ignoring parking regulations. And do you agree that parking enforcement should be carried out fairly and equally across all parts of the borough.

Councillor Ross: Thank you and as I said in my first answer, we go to known hotspots based on past experience and intelligence from the public and other agencies which includes the police and a large number of tickets have been issued in the Norwich Road area within the last few months.

In the period March 17 to April 18 we issued just under 20,000 penalty charge notices throughout the town showing that actually our team of 13 are doing an excellent job and in all parts of the town.

Question 3 to be put to Councillor Ellesmere by Councillor Carnall

Councillor Carnall: If I may ask the Leader of the Council how many people have reported accidents since the works were completed

Mayor: Sorry Councillor Carnall, can you turn on your microphone. People are saying they can't hear. Thank you.

Councillor Carnall: People rarely say they can't hear me, but never mind. How many people have reported accidents since the works were completed on the Cornhill

Mayor: They still can't hear. It is on, is it? That sounds better. Thank you.

Councillor Carnall: I'll try again Madam Mayor. Right, how many people have reported accidents since the works were completed on the Cornhill and have any legal claims been made against the Council as a result.

Councillor Ellesmere: Thank you Councillor Carnall. The council has received three notifications of accidents. No legal claims have been submitted.

Question 4 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Reynolds

Councillor Reynolds: To ensure IBC plays its part in protecting the environment is it possible that we can conduct an audit of all single use plastic items used over the course of a year? Thank you.

Councillor Jones: Thank you Councillor Reynolds. The Short answer is Yes, and it's happening already. Officers are currently producing an audit of all operational areas, and in fact some work has already begun in some parts of the council. You may have noticed that in Grafton House on the Ground Floor what were plastic cups in the two large rooms are now compostable paper at my request, and I'm happy to pursue, if you've got any good ideas Councillor Reynolds, I'm happy to pursue them further. Thank you.

Councillor Reynolds: I do and the supplementary is a further good idea, so Councillor Jones would love to hear this. As we sub-let premises in both St Margaret's and Holywells Park, I think an example, to privately run coffee shops . .

Councillor Jones: I'm really sorry. I did not catch any of the beginning of that question. Sorry.

Mayor: Would you like to repeat that please?

Councillor Reynolds: As we sub-let premises on St Margaret's Park, and Christchurch Park and Holywells Park, to privately run coffee shops, would it be possible that future lease agreement could ensure that they can only sell compostable coffee cups, because that would make a vast difference to our annual use of single-use plastics and non-disposables, would you agree? Thank you.

Councillor Jones: I do agree Madam Mayor and I think that's a perfectly possible idea. Thank you.

Question 5 to be put to Councillor Gardiner by Councillor Pope

Councillor Pope: Will you act to ensure all new developments in Ipswich include “hedgehog highways”?

Councillor Gardiner: Can I thank Cllr Pope for the most unusual question to a Chair of Planning. The first for a long, long time I’m pleased to say. I assume that Cllr Pope is actually referring to major new developments rather than any new development that takes place, for example things like house extensions which could be classed as developments.

In which case, I believe the adopted Local Plan’s biodiversity policies do cover this sufficiently.

Question 6 to be put to Councillor Ellesmere by Councillor Cenci

Councillor Cenci: Could the Portfolio Holder inform us if the Cornhill Project was completed on budget and if so what, if any, 'Value Engineering' took place?

Councillor Ellesmere: Thank you Councillor Cenci. The final costs of the project are still being calculated, however, it's anticipated that a very small overspend – around 2% of the project cost - will be the outcome once final accounts have been confirmed.

In terms of 'value engineering', this was an exercise that occurred prior to any works starting on site. So for example we reduced the amount of water jets being provided, which reduced the cost of the feature and we removed work to Lloyds Avenue and Debenhams Colonnade.

Councillor Cenci: Can I ask then, if following that "value engineering", and I'm sure there's more than that, but perhaps I can be told another time, following that "value engineering", has this reduced the estimated cost of the yearly maintenance which was stated as nearly £37,000 a year?

Councillor Ellesmere: We've certainly not adjusted the budget for maintenance, but clearly after a year's operation we will review it and if we don't need as much then it will be reduced in future years' budgets.

Question 7 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Harsant

Councillor Harsant: What action is IBC taking to address the worsening issue of Rats in our Town Centre; it is a health hazard and an awful advert for our already struggling Town Centre?

Councillor Smart: One, it should be remembered that the Council does not have responsibility to deal with rats on individual properties - that responsibility lies with the individual land owners - we do investigate reports we receive of sightings of rats and we provide advice to businesses and residents on how best to deal with rat problems.

We have 90 litter bins within the Town Centre in order to try and discourage the dropping of litter, we litter pick throughout the town centre 7 days a week from 5:30am in the morning to 7pm in the evening, and we are promoting an anti-littering message using the slogan 'Love your Street'.

Earlier this year the Council approved an additional budget of £75,000 a year to improve town centre cleanliness and we are receiving some positive comments about the high standard of cleanliness in the town centre.

The Council uses its enforcement powers to require landowners to address rats on their land and the Council's Public Protection team uses its powers to require businesses and individuals to dispose of waste appropriately which reduces food and harbourage for rats.

Councillor Harsant: Thank you Councillor Smart. Can I just ask then, that if you would give serious consideration to how we, the council, relook at how we deal with street cleaning and waste collection especially in view of the new restaurants and the change in the night economy.

Could we also consider gull proof bags/seagull proof bags which are used by many councils round the country because living in the town centre, as soon as waste goes out at 5.00pm at night, the gulls go down, rip it open, and to my mind, it's never cleared much before 5.30am in the morning.

It might be worth noting that Suffolk Coastal District Council manage to deal with their rat population in a very quick way indeed, and I do think having had yet another complaint today, that we ought to do that.

Mayor: I think it's probably slightly beyond the rat problem, but I was being lenient. Councillor Smart do you have any response?

Councillor Smart: Much of what Councillor Harsant has included in her supplementary question was the subject of a communication that we had from a colleague of hers, which was Councillor Fisher and the reply dealing with all those points was given to Councillor Fisher by James Fairclough. With Councillor Fisher's permission I'm happy to forward that detailed response to Councillor Harsant and hopefully that will address the issues she's raised.

Question 8 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Reynolds

Councillor Reynolds: Can you please advise how many trees have been illegally felled in the St Margaret's Conservation Area, and how many of those have led to convictions?

Councillor Jones: To clarify and possibly educate, I need to advise that there is no specific St. Margaret's Conservation Area, in fact St Margaret's Ward to which I think you're referring comprises all and parts of six separate conservation areas. However, I get your question.

There have been no convictions within the St Margaret's Ward for unlawful tree felling. Currently officers are progressing a single enforcement investigation relating to the unauthorised 'cutting back' of a tree in the Christchurch Street Conservation Area.

Councillor Reynolds: No convictions? Shocking! The question is . . .

Mayor: Is that a statement?

Councillor Reynolds: Not something I would be proud of! How is the council enforcing the destruction of trees between Tuddenham Avenue and Vermont Crescent? Is a replanting order possible or some other form of punishment?

Councillor Jones: Well I'm very sorry we're not going round prosecuting enough people in St Margaret's but you know we can only do it, when the law allows. I'm sure you wouldn't want us to do anything but. If you have specific incidents like the Tuddenham Road trees, then please send them to me. We can only deal on information that we have given to us and I hope that that has been passed on to officers as I would expect a councillor to do, Councillor Reynolds.

I will just clarify the procedures officers have laid this down for me. If a tree has a preservation order on it, or it's within a conservation area, then it has protection against unauthorised works, including felling but not only. And there are set procedures which we are obliged to follow in achieving consent for works to trees in these circumstances, so in conservation areas there are processes.

So there are times when a person can be given - can give - 5 days notice for works to trees, which are exempt from the formal consent procedures, and this is where an arboriculturalist has inspected them or they've been inspected and we would agree that they are dead, dying or dangerous and in those circumstances works can be carried out.

It's relatively common for this to be a source of complaint to residents who are unaware of the health of the tree, so people get very angry about works being done to trees that look fine but in fact are not well and actions as approved have been taken. But I urge Councillor Reynolds to get in touch with me if he has any information about illegal activity of this kind in St Margaret's.

Question 9 to be put to Councillor Ellesmere by Councillor Carnall

Councillor Carnall: In view of the accidents reported to the council, is the Council commissioning an independent review of the safety and quality of works on the Cornhill, especially in relation to disabled pedestrians, including those who may be blind?

Councillor Ellesmere: The Council sought and received independent advice from local disability groups prior to the design of the scheme being finalised and during the construction phase in order to ensure the scheme was appropriate for all users. As a result of this consultation, and public feedback, the scheme was subject to further revision and redesign, including the provision of a hand finish to the stonework for a smoother finish. The scheme also fully complies with all building regulations requirements in this regard.

It is important to note that the Cornhill works passed a full safety audit which was carried out by Suffolk County Council prior to the area opening.

However we have subsequently become aware of an issue with one stepped element on the Cornhill where we have taken temporary action until a permanent solution can be installed.

Councillor Carnall: Does Councillor Ellesmere share my disappointment that although the council spent nearly £4m of public money on the Cornhill development, the needs of disabled and elderly people were not properly catered for from day one.

Councillor Ellesmere: As Councillor Carnall is well aware the council did not spend £4m on this scheme. The majority of the money came from other organisations, such as Conservative-run Suffolk County Council, and from the Conservative government via the LEP. As I said, we took advice, thank you Madam Mayor. We took advice from independent disability groups prior to the scheme being progressed and it was subject to a full safety audit carried out by Conservative-run Suffolk County Council. It passed that audit, which is why we opened it. However, we have identified this one additional element where we do believe we do need to undertake further work.

Now any scheme would be great if we could get it 100% right, straight from the outset and that is certainly the ideal. But I am reminded of a scheme that was undertaken by the former Conservative and Liberal Democrat administration towards the end of their time, that was probably the only major scheme they did in the town centre, but it was the Giles Circus scheme where I remember huge complaints about people tripping up, I think there were legal claims against the council against those. Now, that scheme, people have got used to it, it is well-liked but there were certainly teething problems on that scheme just as there are on the Cornhill and I would have thought, given Councillor Carnall's experience of that, perhaps a little more understanding and humility may be appropriate.

Question 10 to be put to Councillor Meudec by Councillor Fisher

Councillor Fisher: The Funding guidelines for Area Committees on the IBC website state that there are several reasons not to fund a project. One of these reasons is if the funding request came from a 'Grant making organisation'. If this is the case how are IBC allowed to go to their own Area Committees to receive funding for projects that could and should come from existing budgets?

Councillor Meudec: Thank you madam Mayor and Councillor Fisher for the question as well. The question links two things which actually are governed by different rules.

Area Committees are able to make decisions in relation to any works or services to be provided by the council in the Area out of their budgets in line with their Area Action Plans.

Area Committees have a totally separate function to award monies to third party community organisation and it is this function which is subject to the funding guidelines.

I appreciate that sometime the wording used at Committees probably contributes to the confusion in this area and I will definitely ask and work with officers to look at making things clearer in the future.

Councillor Fisher: Does the portfolio holder think it correct that money that's given for community projects for area committees is used for things like graffiti removal and cleaning in the town centre when there is a separate budget for this already?

Councillor Meudec: Well, the short answer is yes, but if, just for that particular example, if Councillor Fisher were to look at the report presented to the Central Area Committee 17th January 2018, the first paragraph of the report states that the reserved amount is to remove fly-tipping from areas not covered by our statutory duty.

As I said, we are going to look at the wordings again on the website so it will be clearer and very transparent.

Question 11 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Pope

Councillor Pope: What steps is IBC taking or planning to take to increase Ipswich's Bee population?

Councillor Smart: Thank you Councillor Pope because I think our record's probably better than most on this.

The Council looks to promote, maintain and enhance all biodiversity within the Borough of Ipswich through the Biodiversity Policy which takes us to 2023.

Now, throughout the Borough we promote, maintain and enhance natural habitats, long grass meadows and wildlife areas that benefit bee populations and other pollinators – including butterflies, moths, flies, hoverflies, beetles and so on - all of which are suffering massive declines in our farmed countryside. Urban areas are now recognised as key to insect species survival – so the work we do in the wild areas we provide are truly vital.

Ipswich was selected as a partner by Buglife for the Urban Buzz Project due to the excellent work we do - 'Urban Buzz' is a national Project working in 9 cities or urban areas across the UK so we are in a fairly good position.

In Ipswich, the Council funded Greenways Project has managed to unlocked around £150,000 of funding to create new nectar rich areas totalling 62 acres across the Greenways Project area.

And there are several other examples. One I will give you is that at Holywells Park we now have 9 active bee hives – 7 of which have been purchased through the recent HLF funding which has also enabled us to train 10 people as bee keepers.

Councillor Pope: Thank you Councillor Smart for the answer. Is Councillor Smart aware of the progress in Amsterdam where they've increased the Bee populations by 45%? Or does he agree it's not just about increasing pollination in parks but also bringing that out into the wider town areas. Could we look at planting more native wild flowers? Will we consider using weed-killers that don't harm insects? Can Ipswich do these things also?

Councillor Smart: I'm not familiar with the position in Amsterdam but just to include some of the other examples that I was given as part of this question, we do allow allotment holders to keep bees on allotment sites; we regularly hold community events encouraging wild-life friendly gardening; and you'll be very pleased to hear because this directly answers your supplementary question, the council makes sure that it doesn't use any insecticides that pose a danger to bees.

Our Customer Contact Centre will arrange for accredited bee keepers to safely collect bee-swarms notified by the public, and we also as I think I alluded to earlier, in order to maintain natural habitats and the long grass areas in parks, these are not left uncut just to save money, it's a very genuine biodiversity improvement in line with the council's long term aims and policies

and I think it's fair to say that we can do these things on land that we own, and it's much more difficult to prescribe action on the land that we do not own but I hope by setting a good example for others to follow, that we can do something to support the bees population in Ipswich.

Question 12 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Xhaferaj

Councillor Xhaferaj: Does IBC support changes to the Star Lane gyratory and is there still a commitment to increase east/west transport capacity in Ipswich?

Councillor Smart: I am not aware of any firm proposals to change the Star Lane gyratory.

Any changes that may have been talked about previously were generally predicated on the reduction in traffic through the gyratory as a result of construction of an alternative route.

The likely cancelling of the Upper Orwell Crossings project by Suffolk County Council will make any immediate changes to the gyratory unlikely, but we believe the main focus for improving east/west capacity should be the construction of a Northern Relief Road.

Question 13 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Hall

Councillor Hall: With Poor Air Quality being such an issue in some areas of our Town what steps will the Council be taking to support bus operators, especially Ipswich Buses, to ensure their fleets meet the Euro 6 standards for diesel engines?

Councillor Smart: This is an area where we have to treat all operators equally and not single out any special treatment for the company that we still own.

The Council is currently consulting on its proposed Air Quality Action Plan and this contains actions relating to improved emission standards for buses. As part of the actions development the Council has held discussions with the main bus operators in the area. These discussions have included the feasibility of them achieving improved emissions from their fleets, but could I also make the point that if a bus can do the work of twenty cars the more people who use buses the less cars are emitting harmful emissions as well.

Question 14 to be put to Councillor Ellesmere by Councillor Fisher

Councillor Fisher: Please could you give an update in all activities concerning 1 Cornhill, the old Post Office building?

Councillor Ellesmere: Thank you Councillor Fisher.

In March 2018 Executive considered the terms of a proposed letting of part of the building for use as a restaurant. However, a couple of months ago the prospective tenant confirmed that they did not wish to progress that deal. We are in the process of planning and carrying out dilapidations works to the building and marketing it to secure a new tenant. We want any new tenant to be one which contributes to the economy of the town at this prime location and we fully expect marketing to be easier now that the Cornhill is complete. Officers are in discussion with several interested parties but no firm proposals have yet been received.

Councillor Fisher: Would the Leader agree with me that the time taken to let what is a prime property in this centre of our town kind of highlights the pressure on commercial retail and those kind of developments in town centres, so maybe it isn't the time to be investing millions of pounds in out-of-town retail parks creating further competition to our already struggling town centre?

Mayor: I'm not quite sure that relates to the previous question entirely, but Councillor Ellesmere is there anything you wish to respond?

Councillor Ellesmere: This was a deal relating to one particular operator who we understand that they do have a habit of only completing a proportion of the sites that they work up.

I'm glad Councillor Fisher raised the investment that we announced yesterday. This is something which is a good deal for the borough council; it will bring us in £400,000 worth of income which, if we didn't have, we'd be looking at cuts in services.

We've had the amount of money that we receive from the government cut by £10 million a year since 2010 and it's something that I'm proud of that we have managed to weather those huge cuts without making cuts in services ourselves.

What I do recall, though, is for each of the property investments that we've made, Councillor Fisher has found a different reason to oppose every one of them. And if you cast your mind back to the last council meeting, at the last budget meeting, where we discussed commercial property investment, Councillor Fisher said that our strategy was entirely wrong and that we were investing everything within the borough of Ipswich and we should follow the lead of Mid Suffolk and Babergh, and invest outside the borough boundary. Well we've done exactly what Councillor Fisher wanted us to do but surprise, surprise, he's even opposed to that.

What we are getting from our commercial property investments is £2.2 million a year, which is protecting services and if Councillor Fisher and his group had had their way, we would not have any of that money and we'd be seeing exactly the sort of cuts that we're seeing from Conservative-run Suffolk County Council, all of the money cut from CABs', Duke of Edinburghs' cut, services cut left, right and centre, because the Conservatives cannot manage budgets – the Labour party can.