

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 JULY 2019

Question 1 to be put to Councillor Ross by Mr Horner

Mr Horner: The serious impacts of pollution have been described by Defra (2018), Department of Health (2011), and World Health Organisation (2013) and IBC know there are longstanding illegal levels of pollution in Ipswich. In the light of this, will the Council immediately direct appropriate resources and discharge their obligations under Part IV of the Environment Act and work constructively with Suffolk County Council, to develop within 3 months, an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) as required by section 2.69 of Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (LAQM TG) 16 (Feb 2018) that will reduce the levels of pollution to legal levels within 3 years?

Councillor Ross: Thank you for the question Mr Horner. The Council has a duty to monitor air quality and where pollution exceeds the set thresholds to declare air quality management zones. It is not illegal to exceed the thresholds but where thresholds are exceeded the Council has a duty to declare Air Quality Management Areas, a 5th Area was declared in 2018. The duty also requires the Council and other agencies to co-operate.

The strategy and action plan, up to 2024, have been approved by DEFRA and complies with our legal duties. It outlines the action we will take, working with other stakeholders, to improve air quality. The key pollutants for Ipswich are transport related and whilst I recognise we have a responsibility here it would be remiss of me not to point out that the County Council are the highway authority. Though I'm sure yourself and most residents probably get quite annoyed when we just look to put the blame on others and so, because of that, the Council chairs a steering group of stakeholders who monitor progress and includes the local highway authority, County Council and other stakeholders including public health so we can ensure that we do improve air quality for Ipswich residents.

Mr Horner: If I could just read something that's written in the Air Quality Action Plan to start off.

“Air pollution is a major public health risk ranking alongside cancer, heart disease, and obesity” (it's from the Department of Health 2011) “causing more harm than passive smoking” (Defra 2018).

The review by the World Health Organisation who concluded that a long-term exposure to air pollution reduces life expectancy by increasing deaths by lung, heart and circulatory conditions (that's the World Health Organisation 2013). Conditions caused or exacerbated by air pollution ...

Mayor: Mr Horner, are you able to move on to a supplementary question? I don't want to be unreasonable but ...

Mr Horner: This is important because – yes I do. Conditions caused or exacerbated by air pollution include asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic heart disease, and strokes. I could go on. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that this is a really serious issue.

I'm disappointed with the response. Again I reference the Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance on how ...

Mayor: Mr Horner, I must ask you to move to a supplementary question I think, so that if you have a supplementary question to put to Councillor Ross, that's the way we should proceed.

Mr Horner: I have. If you give me 30 seconds I'll ask it. Section 2's the most relevant. Focus should be on top 3 to 5 measures that provide the significant impact on emissions and rank high on the cost benefit analysis and measures package. There aren't any cost benefit analysis and there aren't any top 3 to 5 that provide any impact on pollution. The AQAP should identify measures which have secured approval or funding – there aren't any. The reality is that the AQAP isn't an Action Plan ...

Mayor: I'm sorry Mr Horner, but this is my first time of chairing a full Council but I actually think you're going on too long with a statement and you're not proceeding to a supplementary question, so could I ask you to do that.

Mr Horner: I would have finished in 5 seconds. Rather than exchange of information so that extending the period of time Ipswich people are condemned to suffer serious health impacts of pollution, will you agree to a meeting with you and I, meeting with the Officers with a view to constructively discussing the development of a real action plan that will reduce pollution and so provide a healthy environment for Ipswich people to live and work?

Councillor Ross: Thank you again Mr Horner. The Council itself is already doing a lot and one of the main things we're doing is

leading by example: number of EV charge points at places like Crown Street and Elm Street car parks, our new electric fleet of vehicles and probably our most successful Air Quality Day which included working with a number of schools, which will be increased to even more schools next year.

I understand as times have changed residents all over the country and all over the world are more concerned about air pollution and that is why it is important we get this right, and I'm happy to meet with you and other groups to make sure that our Action Plan is a living document and it improves the lives of all those in Ipswich.

Question 2 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor I Lockington

Councillor Lockington: As the enhanced street cleaning programme began over a year ago with new equipment, can the Portfolio Holder inform us when residents will be able to see the effect of the better equipment in the form of cleaner streets and pavements, not only with respect to litter but also significant reduction in weeds and detritus.

Councillor Smart: We are making and continue to make significant improvements in the removal of detritus and litter in the Town Centre and on all the main routes coming into the town. And I do believe that when you look at the cleanliness of the footpaths and roads in Ipswich we've made a much cleaner environment than many of our neighbours.

We continue to sweep residential roads and footpaths on a regular basis.

Councillor Lockington: Is the Portfolio Holder not aware that with leaving the live or dead weeds on the pavement for several weeks they become detritus and we have the problem all over again with weeds setting seeds and new plants growing. Is he not aware that it's actually dangerous for some residents to walk on the pavement as their feet might get caught in the weeds?

Councillor Smart: Ah, right, well, I do have a separate question later on on the subject of weeds and I did have - Councillor Fisher did approach me before the meeting and thought that I might be able to deal with the two questions in one. And perhaps in view of the question we had to start, saving a bit of time might therefore . . ., so with Councillor Fisher's permission, I will answer his question now because it deals specifically with the issue of weeds, and he's nodding so thank you Councillor Fisher.

Now this year the wetter weather results in us starting the weed treatment later, this year. We've also had a large number of days where the wind speed has been above that recommended for spraying weeds.

Ipswich Borough Council does not have a statutory responsibility to either treat or remove weed growth on the public highway, which includes footpaths. Suffolk County Council as the highway authority is responsible for this and has for many years contracted Ipswich Borough Council to take this work on their behalf. It's been clear to see over recent years that the deteriorating condition of footpaths has resulted in additional weed growth, and in the opinion of our officers, it will take three weed treatments per year to provide effective control.

You will be aware that the Conservative controlled county council made a decision to reduce the weed treatments on the public highway from two treatments per year to only one treatment. This decision will result in weeds becoming more established on the footpaths across the borough.

Question 3 to be put to Councillor Ross by Councillor I Lockington

Councillor Lockington: Is the Public Space Protection Order that was adopted at Full Council on the 27th of February this year now fully Legal and are staff trained in using the Order.

Councillor Ross: Thank you Councillor Lockington and the answer is Yes.

Councillor Lockington: Where will they be working over this lovely summer time with the fine weather. Are they around where there's festivals and music days, or do you plan for any other public spaces where we might see the Order in action?

Councillor Ross: The Public Protection Team are trained currently to use the Order and PSPO authorise officers to challenge dog fouling, urination and defecation anywhere in the borough.

No enforcement action has yet been taken for failure to comply with an authorised Officer's instruction.

We are now in the stage of actually training further teams within the council. Currently the Parks team are now undergoing training so hopefully there'll then be trained to be use in things like our Music Day, etc., and then we'll be moving on to our Car Parking team.

Question 4 to be put to Councillor MacDonald by Councillor Pope

Councillor Pope: Please could you update me on the number of Council Homes delivered since the target of 1000 homes in 10 years was set and since the Conservative Government has relaxed the borrowing rules?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you Councillor Pope for your question. The council has completed 144 homes with a further 77 currently under construction at Cauldwell Hall Road and the former Tooks bakery site.

42 homes are programmed to start on six small sites around Ipswich.

Work is being done on other sites that could deliver about 300 more homes.

I was interested to hear your piece about lifting the borrowing cap. I don't remember reading that in the Conservative Manifesto at the last general election. I believe the borrowing cap has only been lifted due to pressure coming from the Labour opposition.

Councillor Pope: Point of information – I was talking about the reform to the housing subsidy, Councillor MacDonald.

As we're more than half way through and we're not more than half way through building the homes is this not another Labour promise which is never going to happen?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you for the supplementary question. The 1000 target is deliberately ambitious and aspirational and sets a future trajectory for the council especially when you compare it to the previous decades where no social housing has been built.

In my view the decision for the Ravenwood development, politically inspired decision at Ravenswood, has knocked back our delivery programme and you can see going back to 2014 Maida Close finished and obviously that the programme for delivery should have rolled on to Ravenswood in the 2015/16 time frame. But that has not happened and indeed Ravenswood has not started up

again, and essentially the borough has had to take a step back and think carefully about our delivery programme.

Mayor: I think we've had one supplementary question. If you proceed with your have you finished your answer to that, or ...?

Councillor MacDonald: I'm just saying the political interference has not backed the programme, and essentially the borough council has had to sit back and figure out how we're going to meet the requirements of the second phase and structure. It's taken us some time to do that, to set up Handford Homes as a delivery vehicle.

All that delay means that people on the waiting list are waiting longer and longer and longer. There are 1250 people in priority need on the waiting list and they have been let down by the conservatives.

Question 5 to be put to Councillor MacDonald by Councillor Cenci

Councillor Cenci: Could you elaborate on any plans IBC have to use grant funding from the government to provide assistance to homeless people with their mental health needs?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you Councillor Cenci for your question.

For many years the Council has joint funded, through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, a Mental Health Social Worker post with the Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust.

The Council is currently also using some of the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant money to pay for the employment of an additional Mental Health Link Worker specifically aimed at preventing rough sleeping.

You must remember though that since 2011, the Mental Health Trust has had their grants cut by the government by £42million, resulting in the loss of 200 posts of Mental Health Workers and the closure of 140 bed spaces, so getting a couple of people is great for Ipswich, but in terms of the bigger picture for mental health, it's really small potatoes.

Councillor Cenci: Could Councillor MacDonald please stop blaming other parties when there has been a specific funding, specifically for mental health, and would he please answer the question on what the plans are specifically for the mental health side of homeless people, and how we're going to measure that?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you Councillor Cenci. The mental health worker employed under the Rough Sleeper grant is a higher level mental health worker and we deliberately went for that, someone who could really drill into some of the problems of a very, very difficult client group and he is doing a fantastic job. He's been there for a year and he will be for another year although he's said he's going to move on to something else after that unfortunately.

In terms of measuring it, there are a number of KPI's, and we love KPI's set by the government, for the work we do with the Rough Sleeper grant. I will have a look through them and see if there are any that refer to mental health directly but most of the KPI's we

have are about getting people off the streets into hostels or moved on to better accommodation. I'm not sure if there's any specifically about targeting mental health – I'll have a look.

Question 6 to be put to Councillor S Barber by Councillor Xhaferaj

Councillor Xhaferaj: Considering the proximity of a well-used office blocks are there any plans to introduce season tickets at Crown Car Park?

Councillor Barber: Thank you Councillor. Not at the moment.

Councillor Xhaferaj: Is the Portfolio Holder aware that currently, with a restriction of a maximum of 5 hours parking, around 12.00hrs and 13.00hrs there is a mass exodus for people moving their cars to parking elsewhere. It was argued in the Executive by some of the Portfolio Holder's colleagues that the reason we have car parks is that people park in one place hence causing less pollution. Will the Portfolio Holder consider allowing a whole day parking at the said car park?

Councillor Barber: Thank you Councillor. This car park is a short stay car park with a maximum parking of 5 hours and it's restricted to such use by planning permission and by the relevant parking places orders, so this means that season tickets would not be attractive to customers who, in the main, would wish to stay longer than 5 hours each day, which they wouldn't be able to do at that car park because of the restrictions in place by the planning permission.

Question 7 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Harsant

Councillor Harsant: Could the Portfolio Holder update me on the progress of the eagerly awaited benches on Orwell Quay? And if she doesn't want to take too much time up on the answer, the Chief Executive has told me that they are expected in September, after 10 years.

Councillor Jones: Well I'm glad that Councillor Harsant has got the answer to her question before I've even given it. That's telepathy of a great order.

This is the first time this has been raised with me by Councillor Harsant or any member of the opposition, so I will give the answer to the question as it was given to me earlier, and it is this:

I understand that Officers have been working with ABP who the land owners for some time and getting the various agreements sorted and signed has taken longer than expected, however, the licence agreement between the council and ABP has now been finalised and the benches formally commissioned, and they should be with us by the end of next month and then there'll be installed as soon as possible.

But I'm going to read a sort of technical bit which I think is relevant here:

"A fixing detail for the seating and bins has still to be agreed with ABP. The licence agreement calls for the units to be removable, and a means to achieve this still has to be negotiated." So there may be a delay because of that.

So it sounds to me, coming to this for the first time, that it will take as long as it will take and primarily because the borough is not fully in control of the process and we are not the land owners, and that is clearly slowing the installation up.

Councillor Harsant: Just a quick one, because I believe that licence was granted by the University of Suffolk as opposed to ABP. I've been trying to argue this with the Chief Executive for 10 years and this was subject to a Section 106 agreement 10 years ago when the Modus Estate was built at the bottom of Bishop's Hill, and quite frankly I don't care whether it's a question or not, it's a disgrace that this has been allowed to go on.

Councillor Jones: I will simply say I am happy to meet with Councillor Harsant and we can both have stern meeting with the Chief Executive who's fault it clearly is.

Question 8 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Phillips

Councillor Phillips: With Ipswich Borough Council being signed up to the Charter for Trees, Woods & People is there anything that can be done to replace the tree next to the Giles Statue out there that was damaged and removed – even if it is the ultimate responsibility of Suffolk County Council?

Councillor Jones: I do find this, Councillor Phillips, a fairly astonishing question. You acknowledge that it is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council to replace the tree because the responsibility for trees on the public highway sits with them. None the less, you are asking the borough council to carry out the works. And we care about trees, and we will do all we can to support the replacement of trees and indeed the planting of trees on the public highway but ultimately, without the support of the county council or other sources of funding, our council cannot be expected to fund replacement trees which are the responsibility of another authority, which incidentally, prides itself on being apparently the greenest county, but will not stump up the cost of one tree.

Councillor Phillips: Is Councillor Jones aware that Councillor Harsant has already been working with a local charity, which is offering to provide some funding towards this tree and that Councillor Harsant has already been working with Mr Fulcher and Ms Stannard and Mr Wedgwood at the county council where they're keen to sort of go ahead with this and therefore will Councillor Jones maybe meet up with Councillor Harsant to talk about how this can be brought to fruition?

Councillor Jones: Again, Madam Mayor, this was a tree and a question that first came to my attention when I got the question, so I'm happy to meet with anybody but I think that all this extraordinary effort on the behalf of people involved with the local authority which has no responsibility for planting a tree I find rather strange. We should simply get the county council to replace it.

When I got this question I immediately got in touch with Councillor West who then got in touch with Councillor Mary Evans because they are the councillors (the county councillors) that we might expect some action from, so I would prefer to wait for them to do what is their responsibility to do for our county town and not have to do it ourselves.

Question 9 to be put to Councillor P Smart by Councillor Vickery

Councillor Vickery: Please will you outline for me the current policy on allowing members of the public to pay for trees to be planted within parks and other open spaces?

Councillor Smart: Very much one of encouragement. We do encourage donation planting in parks and open spaces, with this being promoted on our website and on leaflets in the park receptions areas at Chantry, Christchurch and Holywells parks, to which I refer Councillor Vickery.

Councillor Vickery: Thank you Councillor Smart. I'm very pleased to hear that. I recently planted a tree, which I paid for personally to commemorate what would have been the 100th anniversary of my father's birth and I was told at the time that the policy had changed by the manager of Christchurch Park and that they weren't now having trees planted and paid for by the public, so can you make sure that the current policy is made aware to all the people in authority.

Councillor Smart: I can certainly raise this with the officers. I do find that assertion from Councillor Vickery to be somewhat at variance with the assurances and information I've been supplied with this evening.

I take it the Chief Executive is listening and perhaps might follow this up with the relevant staff.

Mayor: We partly dealt with Question 10 earlier, but I just wanted to check with Councillor Fisher whether you had a supplementary question to Question 10 – to the response you received? No? Okay. Thank you.

I think that's the end of the Questions, thank you very much.