

Questions to Councillors at North Hinksey Annual Parish Meeting 21 Mar 2019

Answers have been provided by Councillors David Kay (NHPC Chairman), Caroline Potter (NHPC R&A Committee Chairman), Debby Hallett (District Councillor) and Judy Roberts (County Councillor) as indicated.

1. John Marriott:

Please can the PC confirm that Chair David Kay's unilateral statement at the February 2019 PC meeting is nothing more than censorship of tax payer's questions and an attempt to silence the 400+ people who oppose the PC's development of our only Green and Open space, the LM fields?

Answer: David Kay.

For those of you who weren't present at the February Council meeting and haven't had the benefit of seeing either a transcription of my statement or the follow up clarification e-mail that I sent to all Parish Councillors (both of which have also already been sent to Mr Marriott) I will summarise the issue briefly here.

- (1) **Time spent on questions to Council during Council meetings.** Although I have strongly encouraged questions during my time as Chairman, and been very flexible in terms of allowing extra time there have been occasions recently when an excessive number of questions have been asked and that has led to matters later on in the agenda having to be rushed. Personally I actually enjoy answering questions, but the priority must be the efficient managing of Council business overall. I therefore stated in February that (a) we will be reviewing our standing orders in our March meeting with an aim of simplifying and clarifying them, (b) I will be enforcing the rules on timing, deadlines etc. more rigorously from now on, and (c) parishioners will be reminded that they can ask questions of Council at any time by sending them to the Parish Clerk, they don't need to wait for them to be asked at a Council meeting.
- (2) **The expectation that questions will be asked in a reasonable and decent manner.** Although we would expect parishioners to be polite and reasonable it has unfortunately become clear from some communications sent to the Council over the past year that we need to point out that abusive questions and statements including expletives are not acceptable and will not be read out in Council. Also I explained in my statement that deliberate misinformation portrayed as a 'statement of fact' would not be allowable either. Where a statement that is patently incorrect is included within a question to Council the Parish Clerk will advise the questioner of this and ask them to revise that statement accordingly. Any reasonable person who had included an incorrect statement mistakenly would be willing to carry out such a revision, and the only reason why somebody wouldn't want to correct it would be if they deliberately wanted to include misinformation parading as a 'fact' so that it could be read out in Council.

Using the questions raised by members of the public in our February Council meeting as examples, one of which was submitted by Mr Marriott, neither question would have required amending in any

way. Hopefully he will now be comforted by knowing that any future questions would also not be 'censored' providing that they were not abusive or deliberately misleading.

The fact that over twice the normal time has been dedicated to questions from parishioners in this meeting should give a good indication of our willingness to answer questions. I would recommend that anybody with an interest in this topic should consider attending the March Parish Council meeting to listen to our discussions on proposed changes to our standing orders, and if anybody would like to send suggestions in advance about how this agenda item could be improved, to me or to the Parish Clerk, we will happily consider their ideas in that meeting.

2. Terry Mills:

(a) With ever increasing development on Cumnor Hill and surrounding area causing more vehicle activity, what is the policy to combat the increased pollution in an area already deemed one of the worst to live in.

Answer: Debby Hallett.

Evidence of air quality problems are confined to the declared Air Quality Management Areas, which, in our area, are some roads and houses directly adjacent to the A34, such as Stanley Close, Southern Bypass and Westminster Way. Air quality there is directly related to traffic exhaust on the A34. Other areas of Botley do not have high levels of NO2 so aren't required to take remedial action. That would include Cumnor Hill. At Vale of White Horse District Council, your Lib Dem councillors have repeatedly called on the Tory administration to take action to keep air quality below the legal threshold. Unfortunately, they haven't taken action. Realistically, the only way to lessen pollution along the A34 is to control the vehicles that use it, and that's not possible without government action. I'm sorry that I agree with you that something needs to be done. But there isn't much sign of anything happening with this Government, and that is very frustrating for all of us.

(b) Having lost the only petrol service station in the area we have ended up with a larger car park and fewer outlets at the Seacourt retail park, is this becoming the new park and ride?

Answers:

Debby Hallett.

The decision to close their petrol station was entirely a business decision by the owners. Local government has no say in whether people close their businesses or not. Personally I expressed a view at the time that petrol stations should be considered as a planning matter, especially in areas of poor air quality or congestion when the decision to close means drivers will need to add to the congestion and poor air quality in order to drive further for fuelling up.

Judy Roberts.

Petrol Stations are under the category Sui Generis which means they do not have the protected status that businesses like pharmacies have. So Debby is right in that it is up to the business owner whether they stay or go. The only way to change that would be to change its status in planning law.

David Kay.

The original outline plans including the removal of the petrol station were approved well before most of the current Councillors joined the Parish Council, however I do know that over the past two Councils several attempts have been made to try to get the developer to change their mind, without success.

With M&S dropping out of the equation it now appears that B&Q will take the place of Homebase, which will probably be a fairly popular outcome, and relatively beneficial to parishioners.

I won't comment on the various disputes relating to local park and ride proposals from the City and County Councils, but the actual number of car parking spaces at Seacourt hasn't changed significantly as a result of the various changes to the Seacourt redevelopment plans as the space previously taken up by the petrol station isn't a lot different from the space now taken up by a combination of the new Costa outlet and the larger entry / exit.

(c) Will better signage be provided for entrance to the Seacourt Retail park as drivers are making U Turns at the traffic lights at the junction A34 slip road and Botley road in order to access new entrance?

Answer: Judy Roberts.

I wasn't aware of this problem so I will now raise it with the highway's team.

(d) How much more development will be allowed on Cumnor Hill?

Answers:

Debby Hallett.

Each planning application is determined by Vale based on its own merits. Since the Cumnor Hill area is considered an area of lesser density, there are design principles that apply, which you can see in the Vale of White Horse's Design Guide, which you can see here:

<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/VWH005SFS.pdf>

Most of Cumnor Hill is outside North Hinksey parish. I'm unaware if Cumnor parish is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan? Maybe Judy Roberts can say more?

Parking and traffic considerations are the responsibility of county highways. Judy Roberts can say more about that.

Judy Roberts.

Cumnor is indeed preparing a Neighbourhood plan which is in the latter stages before going to referendum. The worst cases of redevelopment were approved during the period when the Vale did not have a 5 year housing supply. Since that was achieved several cases of overdevelopment have been refused by the Vale and the planning inspector. The design guide is being used and the planning committee have refused approval on the basis of contradiction with the Neighbourhood plan. All this is good news and the planning officers were keen to make sure that the boundary treatment was to be in keeping with the rural aspect of Cumnor Hill.

On parking there are more Traffic Management plans in place on new developments but there is a feasibility study planned to be undertaken after May on Civil Parking Enforcement. This is where the District Council will enforce parking restrictions. Currently 96% of councils already do this. I am also looking into reducing the speed limit to 30 mph and Cumnor Parish council have expressed their support for this.

David Kay:

Anyone who has lived in this area for at least 5 years will recognise the fact that there has been significant population growth during that time resulting primarily from major new developments (e.g. Tilbury Fields, Harcourt Place, and soon the new flats within the Botley Centre redevelopment), but also from smaller scale developments where a single house might have been replaced by a block of flats. There are no identifiable appropriate areas for major new developments left in the parish, but no doubt attempts to squeeze in smaller scale redevelopments will continue.

The Parish Council Planning Committee comments on all planning applications within the parish, and has often tried to block inappropriate overdevelopment of sites with the help of our local District Councillors. The final decision, however, lies with the District Council, and their interpretation of the planning legislation in place for this area (i.e. the NPPF and the Vale's Local Plan).

One way that we can more directly restrict inappropriate developments is through the emerging North Hinksey Parish Neighbourhood Plan, which is currently undergoing independent examination before being put forward for a public referendum later this year. If this is adopted it will become part of the legislation that planning applications must comply with. I would therefore urge all parishioners to vote in favour of adopting the Neighbourhood Plan in the referendum when that arises.

As stated, only the lower section of Cumnor Hill is actually in North Hinksey Parish, so that is the only part our Council (and our Neighbourhood Plan) can have a significant impact on. Most of Cumnor Hill lies within Cumnor Parish, however their Neighbourhood Plan will hopefully prove equally beneficial.

3. Erica Davis:

I wish to ask the PC what mandate they have to destroy green belt when there is such opposition to building on the Louise Memorial Fields. The proposal is ill thought out and unnecessary. We have a new Community Centre being built locally and so a further resource is both a waste of public funds! What are their views?

Answer: Caroline Potter.

The proposal to replace the current pavilion and scout hut buildings with a new multi-use community building is not intended to destroy green belt – quite the opposite. The intention is to invest in the parish playing fields so that they remain open green space that is valued by our community, rather than becoming a target for more housing development. The Louie Memorial Playing Fields were briefly identified as a potential housing site a few years ago, when Vale District Council was developing its Local Plan. Local leaders and members of the community were quick to point out the value of the playing fields as open green space, and its consideration as a housing site was withdrawn. We cannot be assured that the playing fields will not be considered for housing development again in the future; if the community ceases to use and value the playing fields then they could be lost. Our intention is to provide appropriate, attractive facilities that will support community activities on the parish playing fields for many years to come. The proposed new building would replace two existing buildings of very poor quality, helping to ensure that the activities currently run in those buildings can thrive for the foreseeable future.

The current proposal has been developed over a two-year process that included a parish-wide consultation last year. The results of that consultation indicated that the vast majority of local residents who engaged with the proposal were in support of it, with just 18 people expressing disagreement with the idea of a replacement joint-use building. There will now be further public consultation on the submitted planning application. Vale planning officers will examine all comments made about the plans and will take them into account when arriving at their recommendation on whether or not to grant planning permission. NHPC encourages all parishioners to take part and express their views.

The parish council has representatives on both the management committee for Seacourt Hall (which will be part of the new community hub at the shopping centre) and on the Louie Memorial Pavilion Trustees. Representatives of the two bodies work together to ensure that the two community spaces do not unnecessarily compete with each other. The Louie Memorial Pavilion specifically supports groups and activities that benefit from the open green space of the playing fields, particularly sports and youth/family activities that include outdoor elements. This complements the indoor meetings, classes, etc. more typically run in Seacourt Hall.

4 Julia Hammett:

When are the Parish Council going to come clean about the fact that the Scouts who were meant to be the main partners in the joint new Pavilion/multi use centre venture do not want to be part of it,

as they made clear months ago, that public money is now being spent to terminate their lease on the Scout hut and that this costly building covering a much larger footprint on our Green Belt , Open Space, does not have a mandate from the 407 parishioners who signed a petition last year and those 190 parishioners who took part in a 'consultation' who want a replacement Pavilion on the same footprint, not what is proposed.

Answer: Caroline Potter.

The Parish Council has undergone a lengthy and transparent process to arrive at the current plans. There are no secrets to 'come clean' about. The 4th Oxford Scouts' central role in co-designing the plans for a new shared-use building between May 2017 and April 2018, and their more recent position of preferring to retain the current scout hut, are all documented and in the public domain. The Scouts representatives first expressed concerns about some aspects of the plans In May 2018, which NHPC representatives attempted to address and resolve through Working Group meetings at that time. After the first two Working Group meetings, in the June 2018 NHPC meeting the Scouts representatives formally expressed support for continuing the planning process towards a shared-use building. They continued to participate in stakeholder and Working Group meetings towards the shared facilities model through November 2018. In December the Scouts representatives took a definitive position that they would prefer to retain an exclusive-access scout hut rather than to make use of a shared community building. Their request to all NHPC councillors to consider revising the plans in order to retain a separate scout hut was debated and voted on in public at the December full council meeting. The minutes of this meeting are on the NHPC website. Parish councillors voted overwhelmingly in favour of continuing with the shared facilities model that had been developed with multiple community stakeholders and that had been strongly supported in the 2018 public consultation.

The plans will now be considered independently by Vale District Council planning officers and planning committee, which will determine what facilities will be available to the 4th Oxford Scouts when their current lease comes to an end in 2020. It has always been this Parish Council's intention to reach a new agreement with the Scouts for their continued use of Louie Memorial Playing Fields beyond the current lease. A clear majority of councillors felt that the shared-use building offered the best facilities for the whole community including the Scouts, and we remain open to working with the Scouts towards a new agreement that would ensure their future at Louie Memorial Playing Fields.

No public money has been spent to 'terminate their lease'. The Scouts have not been asked to end their lease early. In the absence of reaching a new agreement, the current lease will come to an end on its defined determination date of 1st July 2020.

The footprint of the proposed new building is approximately 500 m² including external storage, an increase of 175 m² over the current buildings. The increased footprint is largely due to bringing the sports changing facilities up to Sport England standards, the addition of disabled and public-access toilets, and the inclusion of proper circulation space. The increased footprint is a change from 1.2% of the area of the upper playing field for the current buildings, to 1.8% of the area of the upper playing field for the new combined building. This is 0.6% of the area of the playing fields as a whole. We do not think that this is disproportionate impact on the green belt, particularly when the proposed environmental enhancements are taken into account. But this will be a consideration for Vale

planning officers and planning committee members when they are determining the planning application.

The Parish Council has taken its decisions to continue with the plans for a shared-use building at multiple time points and based on all available information. The claim that 407 parishioners are opposed to the current plans were not reflected in the parish-wide consultation, where just 18 people expressed disagreement with the proposal to replace the current pavilion and scout hut buildings with a new shared-use building. The Parish Council also received complaints from multiple parishioners about anonymous leaflets containing misinformation that were being distributed at the same time that petition signatures were being collected. In response to the petition the Parish Council did a parish-wide update on the plans for Louie Memorial Playing Fields in September, and since that time we have had no indication of widespread opposition to the plans as claimed. The upcoming public consultation on the planning application, run independently by Vale District Council planning officers, will give all parishioners equal opportunity to express their views. We strongly encourage everyone to take part in that process, and we will provide information on NHPC noticeboards and the website on how to submit your comments.

4. Jan McHarry:

Noting recent media reports and ongoing concern about serious air pollution due to heavy traffic passing through Botley and North Hinksey, are the Parish Council taking any action on this?

Answer: David Kay.

Botley is recognised as one of the worst areas for traffic related air pollution within Oxfordshire, and an Air Quality Management Area has been in place for many years without any definite plans being put in place by the County or District Councils to deal with the problem.

I am pleased to say that in the February Parish Council meeting Councillors unanimously agreed with immediate effect to declare a climate emergency and to adopt a Climate Emergency Policy. Many other Councils around the country have voted through similar motions recently including Oxford City Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council but we are certainly one of the first Parish Councils to do so.

Further details about this issue can be found on the NHPC website at <https://northhinksey-pc.gov.uk/2019/03/climate-change-emergency-motion/> including a downloadable copy of the Policy. On its own this won't tackle issues such as air pollution, however it is a very good first step, and it provides strong guidance for the new incoming Council to build on.

I would also like to highlight the Council's work, with the aid of local volunteers, in developing a Neighbourhood Plan that, when adopted, will help to restrict inappropriate developments, and to encourage environmentally beneficial design features, and the use of sustainable and public transport in preference to private cars.

Finally I will mention the Council's opposition to the Oxford Cambridge Expressway. If this were to go ahead then the impact on air pollution along its route would be horrific, so blocking it will be one of the key priorities for the new Council.

Overall this is very much an ongoing fight, starting from what is already a bad position in terms of local air pollution, but at least it now appears that everybody is finally recognising formally that something needs to be done, and done now. By working closely in conjunction with other local Councils hopefully a significant positive impact can be made in the not too distant future.