

COUNCIL MEETING

14 January 2021

Member Questions

Question from Cllr Bradford

This February will mark 16 years since hunting animals with dogs became illegal in the United Kingdom and yet we know that it continues to happen across Teignbridge, with the full knowledge of many of our landowners and community leaders. Can this council's leadership reassure us that it tolerates no such activity on land it manages, and that, if it knew of anyone breaking the law, it would report them to the police?

Response from the Leader

Yes

Questions from Cllr Daws

Q1. It is now confirmed that Teignbridge District Council purchased a parcel of farmland adjacent to Decoy Nature Reserve, (land that would soon after become part of NA3) in 2010 for £100k. To satisfy the residents of Teignbridge that this was done on an arm's length, fully justified and transparent commercial basis, can Teignbridge District Council please supply 1) The business case created for the purchase of the parcel of land 2) The surveyor's independent valuation that supported the purchase of the land in 2010 3) All details of actions that were undertaken in the decade from 2010 to 2020 to gain full usage of the Council owned land to justify and support the rationale of the purchase 4) Confirm that Teignbridge District Council still holds full title to the parcel of land.

Response from the Executive Member for Planning

For sub questions 1 and 2 we have been unable to locate any electronic documents relating to a business case or valuation. An officer will need to inspect the paper file in the office and this will be arranged shortly. Any relevant documentation on the paper file relating to the business case and valuation that can be shared will be.

For sub questions 3 and 4, set out below is the timeline of activity in bringing this land forward and the current situation.

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| 2010 - 2014 | Preparation, public consultation, independent examination and adoption of Teignbridge Local Plan, which includes the Wolborough allocation (policy NA3) |
| 2016-2020 | <p>Preparation of a masterplan for the Wolborough allocation, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ecology surveys and mitigation plans 2. engineering design work relating to the allocation's spine road (which would provide long-term access to this site.) 3. Engagement with stakeholders and public consultation <p>It was necessary to undertake this work before a scheme for the site could be brought forward and implemented.</p> |
| 2019 | Initial officer work on preparation of a planning application for change of use of the site. Implementation of any planning permission would have secured long term Teignbridge control of the site but would also have required significant investment of public funds. |
| 14 January 2020 | Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a Portfolio Holder decision to finalise and submit the change of use planning application. It was carried that the decision should not be challenged and understood that any decision to implement a planning permission would be subject to a further Full Council decision. |
| 10 March 2020 | Executive Committee carefully considered various options for the site, including proceeding with a change of use planning application, and resolved to enter into an agreement to safeguard Teignbridge control of land needed for the Wolborough link road and sell the remainder of the site back to the former owner. |
| August 2020 | The former landowner decided not to proceed with the agreement that had been negotiated and chose to repurchase the land in accordance with the 2010 contract. This was allowed from the 10 year anniversary of the original transaction. |
| 18 September 2020 | Transfer of the land back to the original landowner was completed. The amount received by Teignbridge was equivalent to the amount that was originally paid plus inflation. |

Q2. Directly after the Teignbridge District Council Planning Committee meeting of the 21st January 2020 I made a request to Teignbridge District Council to supply me with the full details of the members of the public who were scheduled by Teignbridge District Council to speak in objection to the Langford Bridge Planning Application 19/00238/MAJ, but who were withdrawn on the morning of the planning meeting. This request was not satisfied and I have been advised the reasons given for not supplying this information have no basis. This request remains outstanding now for close to 12 months. Given there are reasons to question the admissibility of the objectors selected the question is being restated and requires a full answer under my Councillor 'need to know' rights. Can Teignbridge District Council provide full disclosure relating to the individuals who were scheduled to speak in objection to the Langford Bridge Major Planning Application, and who we understand were withdrawn around an hour before the start of the planning committee meeting.

Response from the Executive Member for Planning

A letter was sent to Cllr Daws by Martin Flitcroft on 14 February 2020 which set out a detailed explanation about this point and why the details of the speakers could not be shared.

There is reference to advice being given to Cllr Daws that 'the reasons given for not supplying this information have no basis'. If Cllr Daws would like to share that advice we can review it and consider whether it changes the original decision to withhold the information.

Questions from Cllr Clarence

My question on the 23.11 2020 directed to the leader was in fact answered by the above Executive Member. My question at the time outlined all the information I received from other 151 officers of Devon District Councils who look after IT in house, providing the financial figures and staffing numbers doing so.

The answer I received to my actual question, which was questioning our excessive costs in comparison with those other District Councils in Devon outside Strata Ltd was answered with one particular sentence in this answer as being "we review all our costs each year and look to deliver savings where we can as part of our budget gaps. This includes Strata"

Question 1. Could I have sight of this review please?

Response from the Executive Member for Homes and Communities.

There is no 'one' document that provides the review of our costs. We carry this out as a continuous process and is a line by line examination carried out by Finance throughout the year with Business Managers and as part of the budget proposals. We also review the business plan submitted by Strata each year. This is subject to stringent challenge by Teignbridge District Council and is carried out by Senior Leadership Team in conjunction with Finance. There have been a number of meetings to refine this business plan from its initial drafting. This also explores the

savings anticipated compared to target etc. Any new pressures or costs are also subject to firm examination and clarification. We probably have the strongest assessment of our IT provision through this process and the internal use of IT Requirements Board (IRB) to monitor performance throughout the year.

My supplementary question on the 23.11.20 was "Whilst not expecting an on the spot answer now, as it would be no doubt a Part 2 issue would the Executive member be kind enough to examine the stakeholder agreement, which outlines what would be the financial implications, should we choose to look at withdrawing, from using the services of Strata within the next 18 months rather than letting the current arrangements continue and let me know please his findings of what those financial implications would be? My supplementary question was answered verbally with words to the effect, an answer would not be forthcoming and there is no need to answer hypotheticals!

If the TWO councils of South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council can jointly look after their IT provision at figure of £1.291,000. with 15 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)s surely there is some merit in investigating why, when just ONE council such as Teignbridge District Council, is paying a contribution of £1,836,000 into Strata for this service with 74FTEs split across 3 councils.

Question 2. If the Cabinet member is replying to me saying he is reviewing costs each year Strata included, is he really serious about considering an answer to a perfectly simple question that could possibly save this council serious money?

Response from the Executive Member for Homes and Communities.

See answer to question 1 and question 3 about comparability.

Question 3. With all 151 officers in other District Councils replying to me with answers of what finances are involved, together with staffing numbers doing this, what mechanism if any does he believe might be appropriate to examine costings and staffing numbers, which are so very different between in house IT provision and those using Strata?

Response from the Executive Member for Homes and Communities.

We have already looked at the data provided from other local authorities and provided an answer to this question having made reasonable comparisons where possible taking into consideration not all IT provision is the same and depends on services provided and whether they are in house or externalised.

I have extracted below part of the response to the previous question raised at Full Council in relation to Strata.

In relation to the figures quoted the Finance department has reviewed these and provided the best comparatives possible bearing in mind that each Council requires different levels of support depending upon which services are delivered in house or externalised. E.g. we provide leisure and waste in house and host the building control partnership for 3 Local Authorities.

In addition the figures will vary depending upon the level of support that the various IT departments provide – for example we provide printing and street naming and numbering. Others don't.

Bearing that in mind the figures look favourable as a percentage of net revenue expenditure and per head of population, and the cost per IT FTE is the lowest from the ones we have been able to compare.

We will continue to work with Strata and explore how Strata will help to deliver financial savings whilst supporting delivering future development changes, infrastructure, security etc.