

Questions with Notice under Standing Order No. 6 – Full Council, 21 January 2021.

QUESTION 1:

Cllr Clarke to Executive Member for Planning, Cllr Claussen:

I understand that there is to be a review into the operation of the “Chairman’s Panel” for Planning. At present there seems to be no role in this for the members of the Planning Committee itself, but a very small Group. To get the best outcome for this review, will the Executive Member please commit to an inclusive approach involving all the Planning Committee in the interests of both good decision making, using experience, and transparency?”

RESPONSE:

Thank you for the question.

The Chairman’s’ Panel was established in response to the PAS Review of the Planning Service carried out in 2018. It is led by the Chairman of Planning Committee and its members are made up of all members of the Planning Committee that choose to get involved. Those members sit on the Panel in rotation and whilst it is virtual all planning committee members are welcome to attend.

The Panel is a matter for the Chairman of Planning Committee given that it is a non-executive function. Periodically there will be a process that allows the Chairman to look at how it operates and incorporate any improvements that will enable it to be more effective. That process is generally ongoing and will generally involve the Chairman of Planning Committee, his deputy and officers of the Council.

The Panel was established to reduce the number of planning applications that did not need to go to Planning Committee taking up valuable committee time. It has been successful in that aim. It also allows Members that have called in planning applications to speak and make the case as to why an application should be heard by committee.

Members are always able to make suggestions, based on their experience of the Panel, as to any improvements that may be made in its operation and these will be properly considered.

QUESTION 2:

Cllr Morton to Executive Member for Health & Housing, Cllr Webb:

Could the Executive Member for Housing confirm if there has been a response yet to the application for funding under the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme and will there be a further application to the £300m funding being made available through Local Energy Hubs in 2021.

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question.

It has been confirmed that no response has been received as yet. The Council will continue to review all funding options available to it in supporting its sustainability agenda. It will make applications where it can demonstrate that it has a scheme/project that would meet the criteria of the funding scheme, where this would deliver benefits to the district, and where delivery timescales, match funding or resource requirements to support the project considered would not make the application unviable.

QUESTION 3:**CLlr Morton to Executive Member for Customer Engagement & Member Champion for Breckland Sustainable Strategy:**

Can the Executive Member for Sustainability and Climate Change confirm an application will be made to the Workplace Charging Scheme to introduce EV charge points to our industrial units, as a way to encourage adoption of electric cars and improve the asset value.

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question.

As previously highlighted at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in December 2020, part of the draft work programme being considered by the Council will be to look at a collective approach to electric vehicle charging points. It is important to consider the best and most appropriate locations for charging points to ensure their usage is maximised. As part of this approach, all funding options are being considered to enable the Council to get the maximum benefit from a capital investment that it might make.

Question 4:**CLlr Birt to Executive Member for Contracts & Assets, CLlr Hewett**

CLlr Hewett is quoted in the EDP as saying that the sale of the Green Britain Centre will "generate funding for reinvestment back into Swaffham".

- If the original investment was made with collective Breckland money, why should any future reinvestment only be made in Swaffham?
- Would such a policy limit achieving 'best value' for Breckland residents as a whole?
- Is justification and approval by a vote of Council required before such a policy is enacted?

Response:

Thank you for your questions.

A decision of Council is required to allocate reserves totalling over £100,000. Values less than this are delegated to Cabinet (£68,000 - £100,000) and officers (less than £68,000).

No decision has been made on the allocation of the capital receipt from the sale of the Green Britain Centre. Indeed, the Council is yet to receive the said receipt.

It should be noted that the Council has been successful in attracting a new business and employer to this site and the town at a challenging time.

The development of the Green Britain Centre and its use for over 20 years has provided Swaffham with a local attraction, which has supported the visitor and wider economy of Swaffham. With the unfortunate withdrawal of the tenant - using it for that purpose - those benefits have reduced for the town.

If Council deemed it appropriate to do so and balanced against other priorities, they could allocate some or part of the funding to be re-invested back into the Swaffham locality to offset the change in use at the Green Britain site.