

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS ASKED AT FULL COUNCIL MEETING 20 JANUARY 2022 (highlighted in green)

For ease of reference, original questions and responses have been included.

<p>QUESTION 7: Councillor Morton to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth: The Council planned to recruit a principal planning officer in October 2021. If that has not happened, how many interviews have been conducted to date? When is it planned to make the appointment? If delay in appointment continues, at what point might the Council amend its strategy and use external, shared or part-time personnel? What contingency plans are in place for that?</p>
<p>RESPONSE: The planned recruitment timetable was adjusted pending Cabinet approval in November. The Council is working with Capita to ensure that the additional resource identified in the Report is secured as a matter of priority.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 7: Could Members have an update on progress?</p>
<p>RESPONSE: As per the update given at the All Member Briefing on the Local Plan Update, which Cllr Morton attended, this work is currently underway and resources are scheduled to be available in line with the timetable presented to Cabinet.</p>
<p>QUESTION 12: Councillor Morton to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth: Is the necessary external resource in place to start the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (scheduled to start in Q4 2021)? If not, when will the work start?</p>
<p>RESPONSE: Yes.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 12: Has the work begun and can further details be made available?</p>
<p>RESPONSE: The Council has commissioned Capita (North Tyneside) to undertake the SA work for the Plan. They completed the same work for the current Plan.</p>
<p>QUESTION 14: Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth: TIMETABLE Has work on a 'Call for sites' started as per the published timetable?</p>
<p>RESPONSE:</p>

As the decision to approve the Local Development Scheme was not made until 15th November 2021, the Call for Sites has not commenced. This will be launched early in 2022.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 14:

When will the Call for Sites commence and what is the schedule?

RESPONSE:

As per the update given at the All Member Briefing on the Local Plan Update, which Cllr Birt attended, this work is currently underway and is due to be presented to Cabinet in March 2022.

QUESTION 16:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

TIMETABLE

- (a) What relevant national planning reforms are likely or expected?
- (b) What allowance has been made in the timetable to account for the potential introduction of national planning reforms?

RESPONSE:

- (a) At this time the timetable for reforms is not known as the Government are currently considering these.
- (b) The agreed timetable gives the Council the flexibility to account for possible changes to the system.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 16:

What contingency is built into the timetable to cover any governmental policy changes and reforms?

RESPONSE:

As per the update given at the All Member Briefing on the timetable for the Local Plan Update, which Cllr Birt attended, the timing and extent of the planning reforms is not yet known. However, there is flexibility built in to the timetable to cover any changes within reason. Any substantial changes to the timetable will need to be reported back to the Council and a new timetable agreed.

QUESTION 17:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

HOUSING NEED

In the minutes of the cabinet meeting of 22 March 2021 the Council announced that it had calculated a revised figure for local housing need in the District based on an amended methodology published by the Government, with the result that 661 new dwellings would be required each year, rather than the 612 dwellings per year specified in the adopted Local Plan.

In making a calculation with that result, the Council appears to have used Government household projection published in 2018 and based on 2016 data. However, in 2020 the Government published updated projections based on 2018 data. Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan team calculated, using the 2020 Government projection, that Breckland housing need would be 790 dwellings per year.

- (a) What is the most up-to-date 'dwellings per year' figure? Which figure with the Council use in its Local Plan review?
- (b) Will this impact the Local Plan update? If so, how?
- (c) How is it proposed to take account of future bi-annual updates in the published household projections?

RESPONSE:

The minimum housing need currently implied for Breckland, by the Government's standard method, following the release of new affordability ratios on 25 March 2021 is 643 dwellings per annum. This will form the basis of the new Housing Needs Assessment that will be commissioned in 2022.

The Council will use this housing need figure at the start of the plan-making process. This number will need to be kept under review and revised where appropriate as the housing need figure generated using the standard method may change as the inputs are variable and this should be taken into consideration by the Council. However, local housing need calculated using the standard method may be relied upon for a period of 2 years from the time that a plan is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 17:

Can the full details of the latest SHMA recalculation be provided?

RESPONSE:

The strategic housing market assessment has not been updated. Work on this will be commissioned in the next few months. The 643 figure is the nationally derived standard housing number upon which the new assessment will be based.

QUESTION 18:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

(a) Will future meetings of the Local Plan Working Group (LPWG) be conducted in public with published minutes?

(b) When will the LPWG next meet?

RESPONSE:

There will be an All-Member Briefing in January to update them on progress and the process going forward.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 18:

All Member Briefings are being held in private to inform decision making on the Local Plan. What are the clear and lawful reasons for withholding all information from the public?

RESPONSE:

The Local Plan update will be subject to various forms of consultation and engagement, the details of which are currently being drawn up. The All Member Briefing is part of that engagement process and is designed to provide a forum whereby officers and members can discuss key issues relating to the use of land and the formulation of planning policies. It will often be the case where these discussions need to be confidential as they could indicate how land could be used and what land may or may not be likely to come forward for development, amongst other issues. If this information was public in advance of a formal consultation/engagement process then it could have an impact on land values and also result in work that may be abortive. This approach was supported by the Local Government Ombudsman when responding to a complaint by a Breckland resident in 2021.

QUESTION 19:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- (a) How will the Council cooperate with *Neighbourhood Plan* (NP) groups?
- (b) What help and assistance will the Council offer to assist NP groups in reviewing and updating their own plans in the light of any emerging Local Plan changes?

RESPONSE:

The Council will continue to support parish councils in the preparation and review of neighbourhood plans.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 19:

What level of support and funding would the Council be making available to qualifying bodies wishing to review and update a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan.

RESPONSE:

The Council remains committed to supporting Neighbourhood Plans and is currently reviewing the optimal way to continue this moving forwards. A meeting has been scheduled to engage with Neighbourhood Plan Groups to inform the process on 24th March 2022.

QUESTION 20:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Although it committed to do so, the Council has chosen not to share the advice it received earlier during discussions with the MHLCG about the partial and substantive reviews.

- (a) In light of its stated intention to involve communities, how does the Council justify withholding that information?
- (b) The Ministry's advice remains pertinent. In what way(s) will it influence and shape work on both reviews?

RESPONSE:

Advice received has, and will continue to, inform and influence the shape of proposals and the delivery of the Local Plan Update.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 20:

Why has the Council withheld the advice received from MHLCG?

RESPONSE:

The Council has not withheld advice. Discussions with MHCLG informed the process, as represented in the Cabinet report of September 2021. The meetings that they pertained to were not formally minuted, and focussed around the general approach of undertaking a partial review as well as full update.

QUESTION 21:

Councillor Birt to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

LOCAL PLAN COSTS

What plans does the Council have to use online public meetings, presentations and information to reduce the cost of undertaking (and repeating) such exercises at physical locations?

RESPONSE:

The Council plans to make the best use of available tools and techniques and best practice, in order to maximise the reach of engagement whilst also managing resources effectively.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 21:

Will the public be able to take part in the Local Plan consultation virtually as this had not been mentioned as part of the process?

RESPONSE:

Yes. Paragraph 19 of the draft Statement of Community Involvement that was approved for consultation by Cabinet in November 2021 makes allowance for virtual consultation and states 'Public workshops or exhibitions, if appropriate to the nature of the consultation either in person or virtual via appropriate IT platforms'. The Council remains committed to using virtual tools to ensure the consultation elements around the Plan are far-reaching and inclusive.

QUESTION 22:

Councillor Birt to the Executive Member for Property & Projects:

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY DEBT

(a) Within our commercial property portfolio, what is the value of outstanding debt owed to the Council 90 days after the original settlement date?

(b) Within our commercial property portfolio, what is the value of debt written off:

- i. in the tax year 2020/21?
- ii. the current tax year to date?

RESPONSE:

Please find below the answer to the question raised:

- a. The amount varies depending on the date chosen due to varying payment patterns relating to lease terms.
As a specific date has not been provided, the figure as at 30/11/21 was £361,927.23 but this will have reduced if payments have been made over the last week.
A similar question was asked at the last Council meeting and since then the amount has reduced by c.£35k and we expect this to continue to decrease.
- b. i) Nil
ii) £91,578.76

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 22:

What reporting mechanism is going to be put in place to keep Members informed of longstanding overdue debt?

RESPONSE:

This is not a Key Performance Indicator therefore there is no specific mechanism to keep all members informed proactively and this did not feature in the recent Performance Framework review that has recently been approved. We measure the commercial property debt at 90+ days with a management performance indicator to enable close monitoring and action as required and this is reported to the lead Cabinet Member.

QUESTION 25:

Councillor Atterwill to the Deputy Leader of Breckland Council and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth:

At the Cabinet meeting dated 20th September 2021 the Deputy Leader advised Cabinet that there is a projected budget shortfall in relation to the Local Plan review of £562,000. By the time of the Cabinet meeting held on 15th November 2021 the projected shortfall for Option 1 had risen to £612,000. Please can you explain why the projected budget shortfall increased between these meetings?

RESPONSE:

Following the O&S request to reconsider all information, options, and impacts for Cabinet a further review of the cost envelopes was completed. This identified a need to accommodate a further £50,000 as presented to Cabinet on the 15 November.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO QUESTION 25:

Could it be confirmed in writing [to him] what this extra £50k was for and how it came about?

RESPONSE:

Officers identified this as an arithmetical error within the September report to Cabinet. The figures contained in Table 1 of the September report (para 6.30) incorporated all the profiled spend elements. However, the sum of these figures omitted some components in that table. This was corrected in the updated report, hence a need to accommodate the additional £50k raised in this question. However, the actuals have not changed, nor has the profile or requirements of the spend for the Programme. The unsummed input costs in both Table 1 of the September Report and Table 1 of the November report remain the same.