



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

26 January 2010

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“The refurbishment of the Memorial Gardens is to be welcomed. However the closure of St Peter's Street for possibly a year has led to an increase in journey times and therefore charges for those who live in certain parts of the city and travel by taxi. The diversion down Exchange Street, rather than using St. Peters Street and Little Bethel Street has resulted in an increase in journey time and therefore charges for taxi journeys.

Please could the Council investigate whether an exemption could be put in place to allow taxis to use St. Peters Street in view of the increase of charges which is particularly acute during time of traffic congestion?”

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

“The works associated with the Memorial Gardens project require the entire footway adjacent to be occupied by the contractor. It is not acceptable to divert pedestrians onto the other side of the road. Therefore, a temporary footway has had to be provided in the carriageway with a minimum width of 2.4 m. This is in accordance with the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

The temporary footway effectively means that the street has had to be made one-way and this has to be northbound to cater for emergency vehicle access (fire and police). Unfortunately, it is not practical to make a dispensation for taxis as:

- there are safety concerns – between on-coming traffic and potential conflict with pedestrians and also forward visibility out of Gaol Hill is poor;
- it would be difficult to enforce; and
- it could have an adverse effect on emergency service response times.”

Question 2

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

“The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has been criticised by Alan Howarth, a Labour peer, for ignoring its duty to promote high quality design in the housing it funds and encourages. What safeguards and guarantees will there be to ensure any HCA funded house building in Norwich will be to high design standards?”

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services
reply:-**

“Norwich City Council are committed to strive for sufficient, good quality, affordable housing, providing choice and accessibility and to enable new affordable homes, which achieve the highest standards in energy efficiency in places where people want to live.

In order to meet these we have a number of policies and procedures in place to provide the necessary safeguards and guarantees.

These include developing our land in partnership with local housing associations to higher standards than those set as a minimum by the HCA for funding e.g. developing to meet code for sustainable homes at a higher level, achieving lifetime homes and achieving a silver award under the building for life model from Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE). In addition, in partnership with two housing associations, we have run a competition to choose an architect to design our largest site for affordable housing and selected an award-winning architect.

New housing developments of this nature will be presented to members of the Planning Committee with details of design quality included in the report. It will be for members to determine if the quality achieved is acceptable in planning terms.

As part of the Council's ground breaking agreement with the HCA, there is a legal requirement for all affordable housing to be built to HCA design standards as a minimum. The standards that apply will be those applicable at the time detailed planning approval is granted to take account of higher standards in future. HCA is currently in the process of updating its design standards and will consult on these before final adoption of new standards by April 2011. Through the partnership, we will be procuring a housing association partner to deliver up to 100 affordable homes over the next couple of years. CABE will contribute to the brief and will be involved in the selection process for the housing association, which will include design standards as one of the selection criteria. The partnership with HCA includes the two sites that the Council will develop itself. This is the first time in decades that the Council has developed its own homes and so we will be able to control the design quality.

When negotiating with private developers we insist that all affordable housing should meet the HCA's design and quality standards as a minimum.

The current Local Plan contains policies that allow the Council to negotiate good quality housing development. This will be strengthened through the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). The draft Joint Core Strategy, which is the most important part of the LDF, has a design policy (Policy 2) that will give the City Council significantly more ability to insist on high quality residential design, including a minimum score of 14 points against Building for Life. This assessment will form part of the officer's report to the Planning Applications Committee.”

Question 3

Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"In light of the media coverage about the suggestion to remove the cashier service at City Hall, could the Executive Member set out how he anticipates residents paying if they cannot use the cashiers and are not "web-savvy"?"

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

"I am surprised that Councillor George has to rely on press coverage to obtain information on the proposed improvement and efficiency savings to reduce the Council's budget for 2010/2011, when the improvement and efficiency savings for 2010/2011 have been high on the agenda for both the Executive and the Scrutiny Committee and also subject to consultation with the public and stakeholders within the City Council.

We will be encouraging people to pay by direct debit. Direct debit is the most efficient way for the Council to take a payment at a cost of 1.9p per transaction. As well as making payments online through the Council's website, they can also be made over the telephone, either through the new interactive voice recognition (IVR) system, or by speaking to a customer contact adviser. Payments can still be made by cheque either by sending them to City Hall, or at the Customer Contact Centre in person. People will still be able to make cash payments at post offices and through all PayPoint locations. There are 19 post offices, and 59 pay point locations that can take payments for council rent, council tax and bar coded invoice transactions. These are located throughout the city. It is worth noting that in general the Pay Points have longer opening hours than the Cashiers Service, and both are open on Saturdays.

The Council will identify all of the people who only pay by cash and make personal contact with them to let them know of alternative payment methods, and where outlets to pay cash are located. We will also have people available in the Customer Contact Centre who will speak to the people who are paying by cash to find out why they prefer in cash, and, again to advise and support them with alternative payment methods.

Councillor George may be aware from reading the minutes of the Executive meeting held on 13 January 2010, that the Executive looked in detail at the project programme for the closure of the Cashiers Service and asked that the timescale for the implementation is extended so that it has an opportunity to evaluate the progress being made and deal with any issues arising from the reduction of the service through monthly monitoring reports."

Question 4

Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“Would the Executive Member set out his views on Workplace Parking Charging?”

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development’s reply:-

“Before I set out the Officer’s official view of such a charge I will lay out my opinion of any such proposal and the dangers.

Whilst Workplace Parking Charges may be a way forward in an ideal world where actions do not have consequences, it would be an act of political suicide to even contemplate it in our imperfect world.

Let me make it perfectly clear to the businesses of Norwich and to the media that this Labour Administration has no intention of introducing such a charge or even discussing it. Many years ago when on-street charges were being discussed this very idea was looked into to see if it was feasible. The conclusion was that unless the whole of Norfolk did the same thing it would be devastating to the economy of Norwich as businesses would just migrate to the areas in Norfolk that did not have such charges like Broadland Business Park.

I cannot believe any political party would be idiotic enough to even think about introducing such a charge in the present economic climate in Norwich. We need to encourage businesses and show that Norwich is a place that welcomes them not put barriers up.

I have a question for you Councillor Little because you have put this question – ‘has your Party changed its mind over such charges and is it thinking of proposing them or have you heard a whisper from somewhere else?’”

The following is the official officer response:-

“Workplace parking charges are a new instrument to help control traffic demand enabled in the Transport Act 2000. No authority in the UK has yet introduced such charges; however, Nottingham City Council has agreed to implement a scheme which would see workplace parking charges of £253 per annum per space.

There are theoretical economic arguments why it would be fair to have to pay for workplace parking. Provision of such parking represents a significant opportunity cost but which those who use it do not pay. In contrast, their colleagues travelling to work on foot, by cycle or on public transport will often receive no benefit (except where a robust green travel plan is in place).

However, it is not clear whether the introduction of a charge would affect travel demand. Whilst research shows that parking availability is a strong determinant of travel choice, if it is available people are prepared to pay quite high prices to use it.

Furthermore, it is quite likely that any cost would be born by the business rather than being passed onto the employee.

It will be interesting to see how Nottingham's scheme develops. However, I would be concerned that such a scheme in Norwich – whilst it might raise revenues – would represent a burden on business with no particular effect on travel demand. In addition, I am concerned that merely levelled within the City it could encourage business to locate in less sustainable sites at the edge of the urban area. For any scheme to work it would therefore need to include areas of Broadland and South Norfolk as well. I would therefore not support workplace parking charging at present.”

Question 5

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“In light of the recession and recent publicity regarding how various parts of the country are feeling the effect worse than others, could the Executive Member outline the occupancy rates of the council industrial units compare now to 12 months ago, and also how the rent collection rate compares now to 12 months ago.”

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

‘It is clear that the impact of the recession on the commercial portfolio of local authorities will vary and some areas are experiencing high levels of vacancy in their industrial units. The City Council is fortunate in that the level of voids in council industrial units has actually fallen during 2009 from 4.5% to 3.7% and during the period 2008/09 to 2009/10 there has been rental growth of around 5%.

Furthermore, in recognition of the fact that some business concerns could have financial challenges and pressure on cash flow we have introduced some flexibility on an individual basis in terms of payment patterns (monthly rather than quarterly). We have also improved internal systems that have enabled us to identify payment issues at an early stage and to bring forward actions to address these. As a consequence the debt/payment rate for industrial units over the above period has not shown an increase in debts and the debtor levels are no worse than previous.’

Question 6

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“The derelict former council flats on Barrack Street have at last been demolished. People living there were asked to leave their homes in 2007 as part of a new development planned for that site and the site next to it. When the Executive pushed through the sale of the flats one of the arguments used was that the new proposals for the area would include a greater number of affordable homes and office development of a high environmental standard. Does the Executive still expect these

plans to go ahead as initially promised and as stated in the existing outline planning permission?"

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'All members are aware that national economic factors have frustrated the redevelopment of the housing element of this site. However, it is pleasing to note that immediately following acquisition of the 'Barrack Street' site, in the latter part of 2009, Jarrolds, who own the adjacent development site, gave priority to the clearance of vacant properties. In my view this demonstrates a commitment to both the redevelopment of the area and a desire to maintain a high standard of amenity for the locality generally.

The residential development has outline planning consent and this provides clarity of what the Council, as local planning authority, would find acceptable on this site. The landowner or a developer acting on their behalf, has the option to either submit the details required to implement this outline consent, which is a course of action I would hope they would follow, or to submit a new application for a revised proposal. The current consent is for 200 dwellings of which 30% are affordable and, should a new application be submitted, it would be assessed against the new requirement for 40% affordable housing provision.

Therefore the planning application to enable this development to proceed would be considered by members of the Planning Application Committee and assessed in accordance with established planning policies. A key component of these policies is the delivery of affordable housing and the council has an excellent record of securing this as part of new development. On this basis I can see no reason why the council's expectations for the development of this site should not be achieved."

Question 7

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"How will the new Norwich Independent Commission on Climate Change (NICCC) relate to and work with the other bodies working on climate change issues such as the Council's Climate Change Panel, the Carbon Reduction Trust, Norwich 21 and the Norfolk Climate Change Forum. Is there not a danger of overlap and duplication of effort in the proliferation of such bodies? What is the NICCC proposing to do with the results of its survey?"

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The NICCC was my idea in discussions with the Leader and the intention behind it is to provide a document that will set out recommendations and ideas that will influence the way the City Council and the City as a whole provides services now and into the future. There is a great deal of information around about Climate Change but I wanted it to be more specific to the City of Norwich and get the opinions of all sectors of society on how they see the future for Norwich. NICCC is not in

competition with any other body which have specific remits. NICCC has a wide remit and brings together a wide range of opinion developers to help point the way forward.

There is a lot of hot air spouted about the best way to tackle this problem, especially by political parties so that is why the Board is not loaded with politicians. Politicians will and do get their chance through the internal workings of the Council. Also we wanted to get a more balanced view and opinions that would be accepted by all concerned. The final document will make recommendations give views on how Norwich as a City and all its components can plan for the future and take account of the dangers as well as the advantages that Climate Change will bring. Of course some of the recommendations will be specific to Norwich City Council but many others will need to be passed onto County, Regional and National bodies.

The intention is that the final document will provide a blueprint that will/must be taken into account by all sectors of Norwich City when planning for future business and services (this obviously includes the City Council).

'The purpose and role of the NICCC is set out clearly in the consultation document which can be accessed from the home page of the City Council website (www.norwich.gov.uk). There has also been significant coverage in the local press and other media.

The NICCC has been set up to consult with a wide range of local people and organisations across the city. The consultation document, which was developed by the NICCC Board which is drawn from a number of sectors, has been sent to a wide range of organisations and sectors. We have also used innovative methods, such as a Face book page, to spread the information further and to get a wider range of views.

Finally, I should make it clear that NICCC is a time-limited body that will cease to exist when the consultation process and final report are completed. The NICCC report will be reported to the City Council's Executive. The Executive will then decide what elements to build into the new environmental strategy, and what elements to promote more widely with relevant organisations across the city."

Question 8

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Chair of the Planning Applications Committee:-

"Can the Executive Member explain why objectors to a planning application on Newmarket Road were not informed that it was granted on appeal by the planning inspector?"

Councillor David Bradford, Chair of the Planning Applications Committee's reply:-

"Objectors are not notified by the Council of the decision on any planning appeal.

The letter that is sent to neighbours notifying them of the appeal, and the opportunity to comment to the Planning Inspectorate, clearly states if interested parties wish to

receive a copy of the appeal decision they must advise the Inspectorate direct. The Inspectorate will then send a full copy of the decision letter to neighbours (or any one else, such as Councillors) at the same time as the decision is sent to the appellant.

It would be inappropriate for the Council to write separately to neighbours as this would create an unnecessary administrative burden and cost on the Council and would result in neighbours finding out about the decision some time later than the direct notification from the Inspectorate. There could also be accusations of wasting public money if neighbours consider themselves to be unaffected by the development and haven't made any comments to the Inspectorate. Decision details are also posted on the Inspectorate website. The Planning Applications Committee also receives quarterly reports which summarise the Planning Inspector's decisions."

Question 9

Councillor Tom Dylan to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"I have been contacted by residents who have bought properties in new developments and have been unaware at the time of purchase that they didn't qualify for an on-street parking permit. In one case, they were allegedly incorrectly advised by the Council that they were eligible and both the housing association and estate agent were unaware of the policy. What more will the Council do to ensure that all those involved are aware of the policy and are there any internal procedures that need tightening to ensure that frontline staff have the right information regarding eligibility?"

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

"I am sorry to hear that there are residents out there who have not been made aware of the fact that any property built after 2004 in a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) does not qualify for an on street parking permit. The reason that permits are not issued to such properties is because, as I'm sure you will appreciate, there is a very high demand for parking spaces in CPZs and simply not the space available to allow even more residents to park. For this reason the rule was introduced to require developers to accommodate all the parking within their own site, or to market the development as car free, or with limited parking.

I am not sure what more can be done by the City Council to make people aware of this policy. The information is very clearly displayed on our website. Additionally, anyone who carries out a local authority search when buying a property is notified that the property will not be issued with permits. This is not something that we are legally obliged to do, but something we do to aid the potential householder. There has been an issue in the past when people who choose to use private search companies could opt out of asking the highways questions, but as of April 2009 they have been required to do, and we supply the same informative statement about the lack of permit entitlement on new build properties, that we would on one of our own searches.

I am aware of the specific case to which Councillor Dylan is referring, where it is claimed that a potential householder's mother telephoned the Council to check the permit entitlement for a property in the Southwest CPZ and she was allegedly told that it could have a permit when in fact it was ineligible. On the customer contact system this property is clearly identified as having no entitlement, and there is no record of that telephone call being received. Staff in the Customer Contact Team are continually updated on parking policy through regular liaison meetings with the service area and they are provided with consistent and accurate information through their modular training programme and through the Council website information which provides frequently asked questions (FAQ) about parking permits. In this instance the senior management in the Housing Association would certainly have been aware of the policy, and it would have been the responsibility of them and the developer to ensure that the estate agent was equally familiar.

Referring more generally to Housing Associations in CPZs, all managers within existing affected developments are aware of the policy, as are the senior managers within the organisations, and those connected to the planning process of such establishments. Whether there is an internal staff training issue, with the frontline staff not being made aware of that policy I could not comment, but this is not something that is within our control. Whenever we have been made aware that a Housing Association has given incorrect advice we make sure that they are contacted to remind them of the situation.

The situation with estate agents is slightly different. If they are selling new build properties it would be the responsibility of the developer to furnish them with the necessary facts. With pre-owned properties it would be the responsibility of the vendor to ensure that the information given to potential sellers is correct. In the home information packs that are now required for all residential property transactions questions are asked about the parking arrangements for the property.

I am satisfied that there is nothing more the Council can do to make people more aware of the policy."

Question 10

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

"I have received some reports of the Council's street cleaning operation being less effective and thorough than it should be. For example, a resident has reported that sections of pavement are just left out when the cleaning vehicle does not span the whole width of a pavement or has to work around a tree. I have also received reports that the deep cleans are not always as effective as they could be when not all cars are moved on the cleaning day. What action can be taken to make the street cleaning work more thorough and effective?"

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

"Over the last year we have been working with our contractor to improve the street cleaning service. One of these actions was the introduction of the "deep cleans" so

that areas of greatest need got attention over and above the regular cleaning frequencies. Overall these have proved to be highly effective and popular with residents. We are working with the Civil Enforcement Officers, Neighbourhood Officers and the local communities to try and ensure all cars are moved in time for cleansing activities to take place. However, some people may be away on holiday, cars will be parked there by others who see a clear area to park in and others may not be able to move their cars for a variety of reasons making it difficult to complete the deep clean. When this happens the operatives do make attempts to clean but this is not always possible.

With regard to the regular work, the move to neighbourhood working and area management will mean more effective contract monitoring enabling the Council to ensure work is being done to the standards required by the contract specifications. This will build on the improved monitoring functions introduced over the last year. The Council continues to work with our contractor to ensure that where reported work is not of the quality desired it is rectified as soon as possible.

Surveys undertaken this year for National Indicator 195 for Street Cleansing found that on average only 4% of our streets had litter on them. This is an improvement from the previous year where 5% of streets were found with litter on them indicating some success in achieving higher standards of street cleansing

If any member of the public sees work not being completed properly, I would urge them to contact our Customer Contact Team so that it can be raised at the time and appropriate action identified with our contractor can be taken. I would also urge Councillors to report it through your councillor mailbox again so that it can be taken up with our contractors at the appropriate time.”

Question 11

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

“In Regina Road I have received an observation from a resident that, on the first collection following the bad weather, recycling was collected with and mixed with normal waste. Is the council aware of this and, if so, how often has this happened?”

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care’s reply:-

“Over the bad weather period, the Council lost approximately three days work which was already delayed due to Christmas and New Year bank holidays. This did mean approx 40,000 collections were not done according to the schedule. As far as I am aware the Council has only received one other such complaint during the catch up period.

This was immediately investigated by council officers and our contractors where it was found that the refuse and recycling were collected on the same day by two crews working together. The bins were pulled out together but collected separately by two different vehicles. Our contractors have specifically instructed crews not to mix loads of recycling material and refuse.

All those involved have worked hard to resolve the issues and get things back on track. It would be helpful if any complaints such as this could be reported directly either by the resident or member to the Customer Call Centre so it can be investigated immediately and any necessary action taken to prevent such occurrences.”

Question 12

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

“Can the Executive Member confirm if the toilets in Prince of Wales Road have been repaired and tell me if these are the only provision of Ladies toilets in Prince of Wales Road?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion’s reply:-

“I am certain Cllr Divers would want to condemn the vandals that caused the fire that damaged the toilets in the Prince of Wales Road. The toilets would still be available but for that criminal damage.

The toilets have taken longer to repair than we would have liked to repair because we are waiting for parts, which are on order and it is expected that the works will be completed in the first week of February 2010.

These are the only public toilets provided for women in Prince of Wales Road. The nearest alternative is the public toilets in Tombland, although these do have restricted opening hours, but are able to be opened on the evenings when the Taxi Marshalling takes place, something which I am pleased to report is happening because of the action of the City Council and its officers.”

Question 13

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

“Will Norwich City Council please show support to the Norfolk Constabulary as they continue to stop and prosecute those who drive in Norwich whilst using a (non-hands-free) mobile phone?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion’s reply:-

“The City Council is of course delighted to offer support to any initiative to improve road safety and stop drivers committing offences when behind the wheel.”

Question 14

Councillor Keith Driver to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

“Could I ask the Portfolio Holder what she thinks about the Eastern Daily Press (EDP) headline story of 20 January 2010 that the County Council is cutting funding to schools in deprived areas and whether she agrees with me that this is another reason why Norwich needs a unitary council.”

Councillor Susan Sands, Executive Member for Children and Young People’s reply:-

“Over the last 3 years Norwich City Council has been on an improvement journey. The “Aiming for Excellence” programme was designed to move the Council forward. However, the recent economic downturn has had a dramatic effect on the City Council’s financial position. In September 2008, the City Council was in a strong position, having built up reserves of over £10m through prudent planning, and having identified over £2m of efficiency savings. We also had no money invested in any Icelandic Banks.

As with the County Council, the global economic situation has impacted on our income levels which was compounded by national changes to the concessionary fares scheme, with Norwich City Council’s costs rise by approximately £1.9m per year, whilst costs for most other councils in Norfolk have decreased. This is coupled with a dramatic increase in demand for certain council services such as housing benefits, homelessness and family support.

In spite of all this, Norwich City Council has always kept the well-being of Norwich citizens at the forefront of every decision which has been made; particularly in regard to our disadvantaged residents. The changed economic climate means the council now needs to focus, more than ever, on supporting the City and its residents through the recession.

So it is with amazement that I read of the recent cuts made by Norfolk County Council to our local schools that are in most need of support. Head teachers are up in arms over the cuts to grants made to schools to help those children who are most vulnerable. Most of Norfolk’s schools are in rural communities and deprived areas are in the minority. Norwich has many areas of deprivation, with the ensuing disadvantaged children. A collective decision made for the whole of the county’s schools, may well appear that funding for deprivation is not a high priority. For our Norwich schools, it is an absolute necessity. County should be protecting the funding for vulnerable young people, as a priority. Furthermore, what of the schools (notably Oriel High and Hammond High School) which now need ‘propping up’ financially? How does this make those schools who have not allowed themselves to get into ‘financial difficulty’ feel about future spending?

Schools who are losing their funding (which would have already been factored into budgets), are now faced with staff reorganisation and staff uncertainty. Not to mention the lack of support for those children most in need of it.

Karen Topping, Head of Sewell Park College in Norwich, said the County Council had not informed them about its cut from £308,262 to £219,816. She said: "We use this money to provide essential support to the most vulnerable of our students. We have a nurture group. Without that group, we probably wouldn't be able to get some of these youngsters into school."

As part of our bid for unitary status, Norwich City Council has been forming the concept of 'Campus Norwich', whereby all city schools would participate in sharing good practices and resources. Our city schools have always had different needs from their country cousins and as a Unitary Council; we would be able to focus on these needs far more effectively.

Leader Steve Morpew has said repeatedly that Norfolk County Council has never been able to give schools in Norwich the attention or funding that they deserve.

Norwich City Council's recent efficiency programmes have seen the Council work more effectively with less money. As a Unitary Council in charge of our own city schools, we would not let down the very children in our city, who need funding and support the most."

Question 15

Question relating to Urgent Matters (Appendix 1, Rule 12.3 (ii))

The following question relating to urgent matters was taken with the consent of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance.

Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Could the Executive Member please update Council regarding the situation with cracks in St. Andrews Car Park and help to assure the public and car parkers of the safety of the building?"

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

"I pleased to be able to answer this question if only to reassure users of St. Andrews Car Park that it is safe and also to deal with some inaccuracies in the report that appeared in the Evening News. People may have been under the impression that possible structural problems with the Car Park have been uncovered in the last few days. This is not the case. As part of its programme of regular structural surveys of the council's multi storey car parks minor cracking in the top deck at St Andrews Car Park was identified in the middle of last year.

The car park is a steel column structure supporting concrete decks. The top deck has shown signs of cracking around two small areas where drainage channels are located. We began monitoring these cracks in July 2009, and after six months decided to install props as a precautionary measure to ensure the areas affected can continue to be used safely while further monitoring continues. Because the supports are required at the top deck, it is necessary for propping to be continued down to the

ground floor in order not to increase loadings on intermediate decks, so the props are placed throughout the car park.

So the Council picked up this matter some 6 months ago and appointed consultants to advise on the work required to address this matter. A draft report has just been received but not assessed. The report will identify what, if any, works are required. As shown above it is a localised issue that does not have ramifications for the floors below. In terms of cost, any works would be assessed to determine liability and the matter is with Council/contractor insurers. Our own survey will help establish where liability would rest. We do not expect to have any liability for putting right defects found.

In short, all of the points raised by Councillor A. Little have been dealt with or are currently under consideration and I hope he will make it clear, in any further public pronouncements, that the car park is safe to use and that the Council acted in a timely and effective fashion.

I'm also sorry to disappoint Councillor Rupert Read and the Evening News who characterised St Andrews car park as a liability. Nothing could be further from the truth.

St Andrews car park has been a success since its opening, winning the Best New UK Car Park of the Year award in 2006 and rapidly growing its income from day one. In the financial year 2008/9 this one car park was responsible for delivering 43% of the Gross income from the Councils portfolio of 16 car parks contributing just under £2,000,000.

This equates to over 635,000 car visits (and an estimate of over a million people) to the car park during the financial year providing vital support to businesses, residents and visitors to the City centre especially the Exchange Street and Lanes areas.

The car park is open 24 hrs a day and is acknowledged by customers as a safe, well maintained and vital asset providing key access to the City."