



NORWICH
City Council

Council

20 July 2021

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“The site of the old Kings Arms public house on Mile Cross Road is imminently to be developed, with five new properties planned, including family homes. Since the pub closed in 2000 the site has long been an eyesore and now the council has gone through the painstaking process of a Compulsory Purchase Order this derelict area will be transformed. This proactive work by the council is excellent to see, and the increased provision of much-needed housing is also to be welcomed. Could the cabinet member for social housing comment on the progress of the site?”

Councillor Harris, the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“I am pleased to say that cabinet has now approved the awarding of a contract to deliver five much needed family homes on this site, assuming the budget is approved later tonight we will be in a position to proceed with the development so far.

The builders should be on site in September. Delivering 5 family council homes using a fabric first approach with good space standards and allowing for future adaptations and wheelchair access. The housing mix on the Kings Arms site was agreed with the home options team to meet the highest need in this part of the city. I look forward to handing over the key to tenants next year.”

Question 2

Councillor Erin Fulton-McAlister to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“Since the loss of the Norwich Joint Highways Agreement, I have noticed how the grass cutting along main roads and particularly the major roundabouts have noticeably deteriorated, in line with the level of service which the rest of the county receive. Residents in my ward, like everyone across this city, want to see Norwich well maintained and their local environment kept presentable. Will the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth comment on this issue and raise this concern through his channels at County Hall?”

Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s response:

“City council officers are aware of the concerns of the city’s elected members and residents. We have been working with our colleagues at the county council to improve maintenance standards, and they have put in place performance improvement measures with their contractors. These have resulted in an improvement in grass cutting in the short term, and officers will continue to monitor this between now and the end of the grass cutting season

In addition, £60,000 has been made available through the opening up fund to improve landscaped areas within the city. Work is now underway to clear overgrown shrub and flower beds to improve their appearance, and this work will be completed by the end of the summer. We are also in preliminary discussions with the county council to identify how reduced grass cutting at appropriate locations could contribute to biodiversity in the city.”

Question 3

Councillor Peek to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“As a councillor who is very proud to represent a ward which contains social housing, I am pleased by the efforts taken to not only build, maintain and develop council housing in the city, but also ensure the standards, rights and protections provided are to the highest level. I am aware of the new ‘Charter for social housing tenants’ being introduced by this government, following the disaster at Grenfell in 2017, and would welcome the cabinet member for social housing’s view on its application to Norwich and whether she agrees it should also apply to the private rented sector too?”

Councillor Harris, the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“The charter for social housing tenants sets out the government’s intentions as part of its response to the Grenfell tragedy. It has been broadly welcomed by local authorities, registered providers and tenants’ organisations.

It places more responsibilities and scrutiny on housing providers, more recourse for tenants. Disappointingly there was no mention of any planned legislation in the Queen’s speech earlier this year and no timetable for implementation.

This council is doing many of things contained in the charter. we have built and will build award-winning new homes. We have invested significant sums of money to ensure our homes are of a ‘Norwich Standard’.

There should be an emphasis on making sure that that the voice of the tenant is heard and respected whether they be in the social rented sector or the private rented sector.”

Question 4

Councillor Everett to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“Investing in creating the facilities for businesses to develop and prosper in the city has long been an objective of this council, and practically delivered through the provision of industrial estates within our boundaries. The proposed sale of the airport industrial estate, initiated through the decision of the majority shareholder, which is Norfolk County Council, has been covered heavily in the Evening News in recent weeks. Can the cabinet member for resources outline the positive reasons why this disposal can offer the chance for potential new investment and much needed upgrading to this facility while providing a capital receipt for this council?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“Disposal of the estate would bring significant inward investment as well as resource, expertise and capital into the city. The scale of the estate is expected to attract an experienced commercial property investor who will be able to realise the wider economic benefits that would follow from such an investment. This would help renew and refresh this area whilst generating much needed jobs and economic growth.

This delivers a capital receipt to the council which would have a material impact in meeting future budget challenges. Additionally, accelerated investment in the estate by a commercial investor would also realise greater tax receipts to the council.

We will seek to work with a new investor via our economic development and planning teams to ensure we have continued influence over the future of the estate to ensure it is delivering the best for the city in terms of jobs and sustainable economic growth.”

Question 5

Councillor Manning to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Like most councillors and residents in my ward I have had to work from home more often and use the internet heavily for meetings. The importance of good quality internet provision to both reducing digital exclusion but also enhancing our capacity to deliver a socially inclusive economy in the city remains a core corporate objective. Thanks to the efforts of our economic development strategy, we now have a significant opportunity through City Fibre to invest and enhance our internet capacity in Norwich. With work starting imminently to enhance services can the leader comment on the next steps to deliver this £50m investment project?”

Councillor Waters, the leader's response:

“Improving broadband capacity in the city is an important part of our Covid 19 recovery plan and we are making good on that commitment. The investment by CityFibre will allow 97,000 homes and businesses in Norwich to embrace full fibre Broadband technology.

A local delivery team has been recruited and contractors are in place to start in September 2021. The build will be delivered in sections with each completed section being “switched on” as work commences on the next, meaning some areas of the city will go live early in 2022.

CityFibre will inform residents and businesses around two weeks before works in their area start, with follow-up communication once works are complete explaining how to connect to the new services.

Whether using Broadband to drive businesses, access healthcare, education, entertainment, or homeworking opportunities this provides a significant economic boost to Norwich, its residents and business community.”

Question 6

Councillor Maxwell to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“I was pleased to see the cabinet report on an article 4 direction to remove permitted development rights for the conversion of offices to residential units receive support earlier in the month. As a city we have seen the consequences, most visibly through the appalling private sector accommodation at St Faith’s Lane and subsequent legal enforcement, where conversion is carried out inappropriately and unsafely. Given the commitment and desire of this Labour council to protect and adapt our strategic office accommodation in Norwich, can the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth comment on his hopes that this directive will be successful and the likely consequences for Norwich if it is not?”

Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s response:

“The introduction of an article 4 direction will give the council greater control over changes of use from office to residential to help stem the loss of office accommodation and promote a balanced mix of uses in the city centre. Whilst this approach may fail given that the government appears intent on requiring a very high standard of evidence, our case is supported by overwhelming evidence and is geographically limited.

Failure to introduce an article 4 direction is likely to result in continued loss of office floorspace, with negative impacts for the health of the city centre and the local economy. Although the government now allows more issues to be considered under prior approval this does nothing to achieve affordable housing or decent design so I hope the article 4 direction can be introduced to maximise the prospects of delivering the genuinely sustainable and inclusive growth the city deserves.”

Question 7

Councillor Bogelein to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“At April cabinet I asked about the need to have a whole house approach to retrofitting council-owned properties. The Retrofit Academy ([What does Whole House Retrofit mean to me? | Retrofit Academy](#)) advises that a whole house retrofit plan is required to ensure a “logical highly effective pathway towards an energy-efficient, well-ventilated home”, taking into account issues such as ventilation, damp and bridging. The portfolio holder for housing indicated that the council already draws up plans for whole-house retrofitting for council properties and I have been promised a few examples of these plans. Could the cabinet member please provide an example of a whole-house retrofit plan for a council property and clarify the number or percentage of council-owned properties for which such a whole-house assessment exists?”

Councillor Harris, the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“Since we declared a climate emergency in 2019 we have been aiming to be operationally carbon neutral by 2030, with plans for the city to follow suit by 2050 or sooner. We have already achieved a 63% reduction in carbon emissions. We are committed to energy efficiency focussing on affordable warmth as much as environmental considerations. This has included insulation, upgrading windows and doors, thermodynamic hot water systems and installing energy efficient heating systems.

The council also has an on-going programme of whole house improvements to modernise and bring vacant properties up to date, with larger ongoing projects such as the renewable heating scheme at Barnards Yard.

Our head of housing will email you an example of a whole house retrofit project.

We will build on our experiences and expertise and develop fully costed plans for our stock following the return of the asset management functions to the City Council.”

Question 8

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth's the following question:

"The city council's Air Quality Action Plan, approved by cabinet, states that 'The Broadland Northway is expected to further divert traffic away from Norwich as a whole, and especially when the final link-up with the A47 is completed.' It is also noted that the city council is not among the objectors to the Western Link as listed in the recent county council report on the scheme. Can the cabinet member confirm that the city council does oppose the Western Link road and ensure that all Norwich City Council policy documents are updated accordingly?"

Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth's response:

"The city council's position on the Norwich Western Link remains the same as that given in my detailed answer in Cabinet on 20 January this year. Expressed succinctly, I have not seen anything to confirm that the rigorous conditions I listed in January have been fulfilled which means that we are not supporting the project at the present time."

Question 9

Councillor Youssef to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“In May 2021, the Conservative Government released plans for mandatory photo ID’s at elections, citing concerns over voter fraud. However, this plan disproportionately risks hitting older, disabled and homeless voters, who are less likely to have such documents. These vulnerable people are the voices which need to be heard the loudest at the ballot box, and these plans risk stripping them of this fundamental right. Does the leader agree with my concerns and will he write to the Prime Minister highlighting them?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Thank you for your question. I do share your concerns. The legislation is fixing a problem that doesn't exist. Between 2010 and 2016 there were less than 150 allegations of voter fraud, spanning two General Elections and the EU referendum -with only 7 convictions. The pilot schemes resulted in over 2,000 potential electors being turned away from the polls and less than half returned. That excludes any voters who were put off from attending their polling station in the first place. The Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, has already written to the Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution expressing concerns about the proposals. I will reinforce our profound opposition to these changes, with a letter to the Prime Minister showing that as many as 2 million people in the UK could be excluded because they do not have the required forms of voter ID.”

Question 10

Councillor Osborn to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“There is a lack of public recycling bins in many parts of the city centre, including around Colegate where the litter bins are frequently overflowing with litter that could be recycled, causing distress for nearby residents. Officers have informed me that ‘The litter bin provision is reviewed on a regular basis and will be looked at again in due course.’ No timescale or clear objectives for this review have been provided. Can the cabinet member confirm that when the provision of litter bins is reviewed, there will be an effort to ensure that areas of the city where there are no recycling bins will be provided with them?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“The Recycle on the Go facilities referred to by Councillor Osborn enable people to recycle materials like bottles, cans and newspapers in public places.

As we strive to increase household recycling, it is important that recycling behaviour can be replicated when people are out and about. Increasing the number of facilities for people to recycle in public places supports our aim of encouraging positive change in public behaviours towards litter and recycling in public places.

Any ongoing or strategic review of litter bins will consider the possibility of providing Recycle on the Go facilities in areas where these are not currently available.”

Question 11

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“The past decade has seen a welcome fall in city centre traffic due to traffic reduction policies. Beyond the centre, traffic has risen in the absence of demand management, especially around Norwich’s outskirts where further major road building is planned. Households reliant on foot, cycle and bus suffer social inequality and Norfolk’s transport carbon emissions continue growing. Norwich City Council submitted an excellent list of transport measures to Norfolk County Council for influencing an updated Transport for Norwich Strategy. However, the county stated the strategy will support Local Transport Plan 2021-36 which emphasises connectivity, journey reliability and reducing traffic dominance. This represents business as usual and suggests the county council has not responded favourably to the city’s suggested measures. Would the cabinet member like to see a transport strategy for Greater Norwich based on less traffic in line with the list of measures it submitted to the county?”

Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s response:

“It’s good to hear Councillor Carlo reiterate the support we received for our response to the Local Transport Plan. We made it clear that business as usual cannot continue and we have been working since then to influence the county council’s thinking around the new Transport for Norwich Strategy. We are expecting a draft document to be published soon, ahead of the meeting of the Transport for Norwich Joint Committee on 29 July. That committee will be invited to support the document being put out for public consultation. We will be comparing how the version published for consultation measures up to our transport agenda and plan to submit a formal response to the consultation, which will be taken to cabinet in September. County should be in no doubt that we are prepared to criticise the document if it fails to serve the city, its environment and wellbeing of its residents.”

Question 12

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:

“Meadows are cornerstones of biodiversity, powering food chains, collecting energy from the sun and pumping it into ecosystems. They are important in cities because they have been squeezed out elsewhere: we have lost 97% since the 1930s.

Heigham Park tennis courts, surveyed by ecologists in 2018, were ‘well mown’. Since then they have not been cut, and species have re-emerged to make a flourishing wildflower meadow where butterflies and moths lay eggs and bumblebees nest. Song thrush and hedgehog also call it home.

The survey in 2018 was done visually. Recent night-time bat recording with monitors has confirmed the presence of several types of bats including Soprano, Common Pipistrelle and Noctule, hunting for moths breeding and living off the expanse of dark meadow.

Will the cabinet member step in to order a resurvey of this new meadow wildlife site in order to protect this mosaic of rare and threatened species?”

Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:

“The council commissioned extensive ecology assessment of the Heigham Park Tennis Courts, as part of the Planning Applications in 2017 and 2018. The report stated that the grass courts had

- negligible intrinsic value, and that the surrounding park had more significance
- low ecological quality, and the impact of the scheme on habitats is negligible
- amenity grassland (sports turf) of negligible biodiversity value.

The report also noted that the project would not directly affect any trees or structures potentially used by roosting bats, and that it was not in a location likely to be significant for any commuting bats.

Finally, the scheme includes an area of grassland outside the all-weather courts which could be managed in a way that provides biodiversity benefits alongside the tennis courts. The Council will continue to use expert ecologists to guide the development, but it is not appropriate to commission a further survey.”

Question 13

Councillor Grahame to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“The Environment Bill is due to make food waste collection compulsory for all properties by 2023. It is good to know that Norwich is already ahead of many councils in offering food waste collection. However, residents in non-council flats are currently unable to recycle their food waste due to the council saying that it is unable to clean the food waste bins. What steps are being taken by the council to ensure that it will be ready to offer food waste collection by at least 2023, or ideally sooner?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“The Government expects all households to have food waste collections from

1. 2023/24 in those local authorities where there is currently some level of food waste collections, or
2. 2024/25 where they are not currently delivered.

Assuming there are no further delays to the implementation of the Bill, all households in Norwich would be required to have food waste collections by 01 April 2024.

The households currently not in receipt of food waste collections are primarily in privately owned flats or properties. Before we can introduce the service to these properties, we will need to conduct an options appraisal on the most effective and efficient way to deliver Food Waste collection taking into account

1. Ease of use
2. Hygiene, and
3. Cost

This process can start once the Government’s intentions and funding for expanding Food Waste collections have been clarified.”

Question 14

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“Metal barriers are blocking a footpath and denying access for those using motorised scooters on Custance Lane in Eaton, just next to a Norwich City Council sheltered housing complex.

On 28 April I asked through the normal Councillor email process that these barriers receive attention to allow access for all.

I received a reply on 5 May to say that ‘NPS have raised an order with Norwich Norse Building to request that a surveyor goes out to look at the area and assess if and potentially what adaptations can be made so that the access through the metal barriers at Custance Lane is made easier for those using mobility scooters.’

To date, 2 months later the barriers remain, and I have not heard another word.

Does the portfolio holder agree with me that this level of service is unacceptable in terms of its communications and its delivery?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“Following the instruction of NNB the matter was looked into, but it does appear in the hand offs between the different organisations no-one has kept you informed. I will ask officers to write to you separately to do this.

I agree that this level of service is not ideal, and the responsiveness of the service and level of communication is one of the things we hope to address by bringing the service back in house or into NCSL shortly.”

Please note that the following questions are second questions from members and will only be taken if the time taken by questions has not exceeded thirty minutes. This in line with paragraph 53 of Part 3 of the constitution.

Question 15

Councillor Galvin to ask the chair of audit committee the following question:

“After numerous attempts to gather information into council policies and procedures regarding the proposed changes to the tennis courts at Heigham Park; the process informing the decision to proceed with the project; the identity and nature of the company/entity which will be the responsible body and provider of the service; and the nature of the relationship and checks and balances with Norwich City Council and the said company I have the following request:

That the chair of audit committee ask officers to investigate the policies and procedures that have underpinned the project, and report back to ward councillors, so that we can be assured that due process was followed and that the process and all entities involved provide best value and are robust and fit for purpose?”

Councillor Price, the chair of audit committee’s response:

“I would be very happy for the Audit Committee to discuss examining the policies and procedures you’re interested in from a control, risk and governance perspective as lessons can be learned for the future and the committee’s role is to protect the council from reputational and financial risk, even when risks are the result of past decisions. For the item to be included on the internal audit annual work programme, the head of finance audit and risk would need to be made aware of the specific issues so they can be considered, as the internal audit plan is agreed by CLT. I would support you proceeding in this way. CLT can then check the work requested is consistent with the organisation’s priorities, objectives, and risk management framework and if deemed appropriate, report back to the committee.

Scrutiny members could also request that the topic is explored by that committee”