

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 26TH NOVEMBER 2015 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Question to the Chairman of Transport and Highways Committee, from Councillor Stuart Wallace

Recently, I became aware of a case where a Newark and Sherwood District Council litter bin attached to a Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) lighting column was set on fire by vandals, damaging both the bin and the column.

The County Council instructed the District Council not to replace the bin, citing the '2014 NCC Street Lighting Code of Practice' which states: 'Any litter bins attached to columns must have approval and [be] installed using appropriate fixing which will not damage the column or prevent its maintenance.' The Code also states: 'The County Council must be indemnified against any third party claim which may arise and an approved contractor must be used.'

Whilst our officers are right to protect County Council taxpayers from costs caused by damage to our street furniture through no fault of our own, will the Committee Chairman ensure that we do not become risk averse to an extent where the public are deprived of sufficient facilities such as litter bins? What assurances can he give Members that a consistent policy is applied across the County?

Response from Councillor Kevin Greaves, Chairman of Transport and Highways Committee

Thank you for highlighting the need to protect County Council street furniture. Whilst every effort is taken to ensure a consistent policy is applied across the County, there will always be site specific issues which may need a different approach. For this reason an individual assessment is carried out for each site. The preferred approach is to have a litter bin on a separate post, however, if this is not possible and a nearby column is structurally sound, with no other significant attachments already on it, consideration will be given to attaching a litter bin to it. The need for indemnification and an approved contractor is just there to protect the County Council, in cases of fitting the litter bin to any sort of column. One example would be if a bin was not properly fixed and fell into the road causing an accident. This is reasonably general in Highways, such as when Christmas decorations are put up.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, from Jason Zadrozny

Can the Chairman advise members of the consultation process with local members when his department are in negotiations with developers about school places and new school buildings?

Response from Councillor John Peck JP, Chairman of the Children & Young People's Committee

The County Council are regularly involved in a wide range of discussions with housing developers, landowners and also the seven district Local Planning Authorities. These discussions and negotiations not only involve highly technical specialist information but are also, in most cases, of a confidential nature due to the commercially sensitive information shared between the parties.

The County Council, which is not the determining authority, are one of many consultees on district and borough council planning applications and, as such, are invited to comment on relevant planning applications and request developer contributions, in line with its services and planning obligations strategy and policies. These comments are collected by the corporate planning team who then respond on behalf of the County Council.

For most major district and borough planning applications relating to proposed developments, the County Council are invited to participate in a 'development team' approach in which relevant officers from both the District and County Council (education, highways, libraries, etc.) meet to pull together appropriate service resources so that a full understanding of the key issues can be discussed and understood.

The County Council aims to provide a coordinated response to planning applications based on evidence.

As previously stated, due to the commercially sensitive and highly technical nature of the discussions and negotiations, it would be wholly inappropriate for County Council Members to be involved in these discussions. However, elected members are, of course, entitled to express their views and opinions as part of the planning consultation conducted by the local planning authority.

As the local authority responsible for the sufficiency of school places, Nottinghamshire County Council officers assess the impact housing developments are likely to have on the provision of places in the area affected by the proposed development. Where there is a need for developers to provide funding and/or land in order that these additional places are provided, this is communicated to the district planning authority who then discuss these requests with landowners and developers in the Section 106 drafting process. Once the development is underway and trigger payments are made, the County Council can then begin the process of creating the additional resources needed to accommodate the children generated by the housing development.

In the case of academies, the funding is 'passported' through to the academy trust for them to use to create the necessary additional facilities, since the County Council have no power to direct academies to implement building works. This transfer of funds is covered by a comprehensive and detailed legal agreement between the County Council and the Academy Trust, thus guaranteeing that the funding is used for the purpose for which it was procured.

Should community maintained schools require expansion, the County Council work closely with the school leadership team, including governors, to ensure that the section 106 education contributions are used to expand and improve school facilities to ensure the children generated by the housing development can be properly accommodated.

Where a brand new school is required, there are processes that must be followed in order for the school to be built and commissioned. These processes include the Department for Education (DfE) 'Free School Presumption' and that requires all new schools to be created as Free Schools.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Highways Committee, from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

I was impressed to meet the winter gritting team at County Hall recently and look over the equipment we have in place, I was in no doubt we have a number of excellent members of staff working in that area for us.

However given the years in which we have had significant issues with our ability to deal with poor weather conditions under your tenure, would you take this opportunity to further outline and reassure members that we are able to do whatever it takes to keep the County's roads moving during any periods of snow?

Response from Councillor Kevin Greaves, Chairman of the Transport and Highways Committee

The Council has been planning for winter over the summer months including restocking the salt barns and overhauling or replacing gritting vehicles.

There are currently around 19,000 tonnes of salt stored in our four grit barns and we are in a strong position to deal with the worst winter conditions.

We have 31 gritting lorries available as well as a number of smaller tractor mounted or towable gritting units that can access the smaller roads in the County. These will be aided by a number of lorries fitted with snow ploughs and highway teams ready to undertake spot salting in trouble spots and footways.

All 1,300 roadside grit bins for which the County Council is responsible have been filled before the winter season commenced and are being refilled as required following the recent cold spell. We are also making deliveries of salt to Parish Councils and District Councils to enable them to assist their local communities.

Contact has been made with Parish Councils and local farmers to undertake snow clearance and ploughing in their communities. We have now 67 farmers across the County willing to assist in snow clearing operations utilising their own farm equipment.

The County Council gives high priority to winter service and we are determined to keep our county on the move this winter. Each time the teams go out they salt over

1,000 miles of road across Nottinghamshire, concentrating on A and B roads and main bus routes.

We are keeping local people updated on all the gritting action and road conditions via the County Council social media channel and the NCC website.

Question to the Chairman of Grant Aid Sub-Committee, from Councillor John Wilmott

Does the Chairman agree with me that it is essential that voluntary groups are an essential part for delivering services to the community in Nottinghamshire.

And does the Chairman also agree with me that because a quarter of the groups surveyed said they have less than one month of expenditure in reserve and two-fifths said they had insufficient reserves to cover for more than three months. Is it not time to put more resources into the sector or are we going to be responsible for the closure of many voluntary organisations.

Response from Councillor Joyce Bosnjak, Chairman of the Grant Aid Sub-Committee

It gives me the opportunity to say how important I feel the voluntary sector is, not just to local communities but also for the County Council. So you should not be surprised to hear that yes, I do agree that voluntary and community sector groups across Nottinghamshire have an important role to play in delivering services in our communities. Earlier this year in July 2015, the County Council's Policy Committee agreed that a Community Empowerment and Resilience Programme should be added to the portfolio of programmes and projects which would deliver the transformation set-out in the 'Redefining Your Council' framework.

This was in recognition of the very significant role that the Voluntary and Community Sector has in shaping and supporting the socio-economic well-being of Nottinghamshire communities. We also know just how important it is to work with and support the Voluntary and Community Sector in order to build capacity within Nottinghamshire communities. We are also encouraging partner organisations to recognise the value and the worth of the voluntary sector.

Councillor Wilmot refers to the Nottinghamshire State of Voluntary Sector Report, which was published in October. We commissioned the survey in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector and it was undertaken independently by Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research.

For the very first time ever the findings of this report provided us with a wealth of invaluable information. It offers a snapshot of the community and voluntary sector, its strengths and weaknesses at the point at 2015 and at that time we are facing increasing changing financial challenges within the public sector as a whole. It was really about finding out just how we could work more effectively with the voluntary sector in a more adult kind of way.

The aim of commissioning this report is to help generate a much wider debate that will assist in shaping a stronger future for the Voluntary and Community Sector across Nottinghamshire and this will in turn create the environment to work collaboratively to target depleting resources and build in community capacity.

We know that there are a wide range and a large number of organisations operating in Nottinghamshire who are involved in many areas of activity. The report estimates that there are over 4,500 groups working in the voluntary sector in the County with 4.5 million interventions with clients, users or beneficiaries in the past year and with a total estimated income of £192 million in 2014/15. The amount of money we put into the voluntary sector, they are able to generate a vast amount of wealth that they bring in to our county to spend on our citizens.

As such the voluntary sector in the county occupies an important strategic position between policy development, service provision and everyday life. The sector is an important economic player and employer, however there are clearly concerns that suggest that the sustainability of many organisations is under threat and we have seen some groups close and, as the report identifies, some groups are eating into their reserves.

The Council, is putting resources in to supporting the sector through, for example, providing £1.75 million of grant aid each year until 2018 to over 130 groups and our Community and Voluntary Sector Team is working alongside the Voluntary Sector service to apply for additional grants from external grant making bodies, and to encourage more volunteering, help with longer term business planning, developing plans for more collaborative working for the benefit of Nottinghamshire's communities, working together differently and building confidence and capacity

The wealth of information gained from this report gives us all a unique opportunity to enable the public and voluntary sectors to collaborate as equals, pursuing an interdependent approach to respond to the needs of Nottinghamshire's communities. Two events were held in October with the Voluntary and Community Sector to discuss the findings of the report. Over 165 delegates attended and a programme of future joint work is currently being developed.

Question to the Chairman of Adult Social Care and Health Committee, from Councillor John Wilmott

Does the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Health Committee agree with me, that it is essential that the services to support provisions for blind and partially sighted people be safeguarded against any more cuts.

Response from Councillor Muriel Weisz, Chairman of Adult Social Care and Health Committee

As many Members are aware the Adult Deaf and Visual Impairment Service (ADVIS) provides rehab support to both visually and hearing impaired adults. It has been an integrated service for a considerable length of time. That countywide service employs seven visual impairment rehab officers and three Technical officers working with deaf people.

Referrals to the team average approximately 40 people each month for people with visual impairments and 30 referrals each month for people with hearing impairments. Care programmes are developed to suit a person's individual needs, and whilst a period of reablement is around six weeks on average, some people are supported for longer, particularly where a visually impaired person is undertaking mobility lessons.

The integrated team has been established for many years and whilst there were a number of redundancies in 2010 there have been no reductions in the teams since then. They enable 90% of the people who are seen to avoid referral to other statutory services, so providing a very effective model of support in re-establishing independence, which is the purpose of the service.

There are staff in the team that have specific qualifications to work with people who are both deaf and blind and the team have well established and modern ways of working which helps to provide a coordinated, flexible and responsive County wide service.

There are no immediate plans to reduce the funding allocated to the ADVIS teams and the Council are committed to providing support to both blind and partially sighted people. You may be aware that the Chief Executive recently spent time with the guide dogs organisation, I think that was on the television I understand, and that was to understand from the Council's point of view the challenges of their service users and I think this visit by the Chief Executive does exemplify our continuing commitment to keep our services relevant and up to date.

However, given the current and future pressures on adult social care budgets, some of which this week were not encouraging messages, all areas of social care support for all vulnerable adult groups are subject to ongoing review.

Question to the Chairman of Planning and Licensing Committee, from Councillor Bruce Laughton

On 18th November 2014, the Planning & Licensing Committee considered an application from Peel Environmental for a Bilsthorpe Energy Centre (BEC) development, to manage unprocessed and pre-treated waste materials through the construction and operation of a plasma gasification facility and materials recovery facility.

My understanding is that Peel Environmental is part of the Peel Group which (according to its website) "holds a substantial shareholding in Harworth Group plc" and "wholly owns Harworth Estates", from which this Council leases the Bilsthorpe Highways Depot site, adjacent to the proposed gasification facility site also managed by Harworth Estates.

Is my understanding correct, and if so, were Members of the Planning and Licensing Committee made aware of these circumstances?

Was any declaration of interest made by the Council and were Planning Committee members advised whether or not there could be a conflict of interest in any way?

Response from Councillor John Wilkinson, Chairman of Planning and Licensing Committee

While it is indeed correct that Harworth Estates owns the freehold interest in the land on which Bilsthorpe Depot is based, the County Council purchased a 125 year leasehold interest, in 2009 which you will appreciate was well before this planning matter came forward. Anyone familiar with property ownership will know that to all intents and purposes a 125 year interest is akin to ownership.

The fact that the applicant in this planning application is connected to the holding company that owns the freehold of the highways depot does not mean that there is any disclosable interest or indeed a conflict of interest.

The Highways depot and the staff who operate within it have no connection whatsoever with the waste facility proposed. The officers who advise on planning applications are a different group of officers to those who advise the Council about property matters.

There is no interest, pecuniary or otherwise which any member of the Planning and Licensing Committee would have been required to disclose, or indeed is required to disclose as a result of this landholding. The only connection between the sites is that they are geographically based next to each other.

To answer the Councillor Laughton's question, Members were not advised of the landholding, no declarations of interest were made, and I hope that the explanation I have given explains why such advice was even not required.