

COUNCIL – 22ND APRIL 2024

ITEM 10 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

10.1 Councillor Snartt – Garage and Parking Site Strategy

At the Cabinet meeting 7th March 2024 The Garage and Parking Site Strategy was approved.

I note under implementation timetable including future decisions and scrutiny, no dates were given when outcomes would be achieved.

Accordingly, I ask the Leader.

1. When will an implementation plan be available with outcome timescales?
2. What was the total amount of rental income loss 2023/24 with 41.56% of the total garages void in February 2024?
3. What was the total amount spent on repairs 2023/24 to garages including demolishing, replacing doors and roofs?
4. Does the Leader see this strategy a priority due to the loss of income to the Council?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

1. *The implementation plan will be produced this year when a newly created Housing Development Manager post has been recruited to. Shortlisting for that post is currently in progress. This is in line with the approach set out in the Cabinet report and strategy which both noted capacity is needed to take the work forward.*
2. *£170,506. To be clear, it is unlikely many of the garages will ever be let, such is their condition. The position in this respect has been worsening over the years.*
3. *£56,200.*
4. *The strategy is one area of work to be taken forward over the next 5 years for the reasons stated in it. Sustaining the level of income from garages and parking spaces that can be let is an objective alongside minimising expenditure on sites that may be better off being disposed of, and consideration of (albeit likely limited) development potential.*

10.2 Councillor D Taylor – Council Meetings

1. Could the Leader advise how much the Victoria Room at the Town Hall costs to hold the Council meetings?

2. Could the Leader advise if there are any plans to move the Council meetings back to Woodgate Chambers?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

1. *The hire (inc. refreshments) for the Victoria Room at Loughborough Hall is an internal budget transfer between service areas. The notional cost is £455 per meeting.*
2. *Woodgate Chambers are still used for some Council meetings such as the Plans Committee and other meetings and events. The Victoria Room is the preferred venue for holding Full Council meetings as it is a large room that can accommodate comfortably the meeting attendees and members of the public. Having the Mayors Parlour down the corridor is also very convenient for holding the mayoral briefing and for robing purposes. There are no plans to move Council meetings back to Woodgate Chambers at present.*

10.3 Councillor D Taylor – Void Properties

Could the Leader advise how many Council owned void properties there are currently and how many there were 6 months ago?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

There were 420 voids at the end of September 2023. There were 480 voids at the end of March 2024. Of the 480, 130 properties are contained in sheltered accommodation that is unlikely ever to be let, a further 44 are used as accommodation for tenants who are unable to occupy their home due to major works taking place (following flooding for example), and a further 14 are designated for applicants aged 45+ and are hard to let.

In recent months, a significant amount of financial, human, and contracted resource has been put in place alongside new policy to support the faster repair and re-let of properties. The number of voids is therefore expected to reduce in May 2024 with a sustained reduction thereafter. The various actions and policy steps taken are summarised below.

In April 2023 the Housing Needs team was restructured, and the number of Allocations Officers increased from 0.6 to 4.0 full time equivalent.

On 4th September 2023 the Council resolved that the HRA revenue budgets be increased by £858.1k to fund additional contracted resources [to supplement in-house capacity] to work on voids and the necessary resource to manage that contract.

At the same meeting, Council resolved to increase the HRA budget by £102.8k on an ongoing basis to fund a new Head of Landlord Services post. The Head of Landlord Services commenced in post in January 2023.

A Principal Officer for Voids (a dedicated management position for void works), was subsequently appointed to, and commenced in post in January 2024. The newly appointed officer has recruited additional interim in-house operatives to support delivery.

A contract for the delivery of standard void works was executed in February 2024. Contract mobilisation has progressed positively.

In parallel, a contract for (amongst other things) the delivery of major void works was executed in October 2023. On 7th March 2024 Cabinet resolved to increase the HRA Budget for major void works by an additional £1.6 million to provide financial capacity for clearance of a backlog of works.

As stated above, many void properties are contained in sheltered accommodation and lack self-contained bathing facilities. As such they neither meet the needs of aspirations of older people, nor can they be let. A strategy framework for dealing with these properties was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 7th March 2024.

Finally, to tackle low demand for properties designated 45+ on 11th January 2024 Cabinet approved the declassification of around 1000 properties. Declassification will take place in four tranches at six-month intervals, commencing later this Spring.

10.4 Councillor Woodward – Regeneration Funding Opportunities

It is positive to see Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds being used for parks, museums and town centres. Does the administration have plans to seek similar regeneration funding opportunities for other towns in the borough, particularly those in the south of Charnwood?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Council will actively continue to seek opportunities for funding for regeneration in all parts of the Borough, whether it be funding from central Government, Government agencies, or the private sector. Current spend of the UKSPF allocation for Charnwood is as follows: Loughborough 16%, Shepshed 22%, villages and other areas 42%, borough-wide programmes 20%. This clearly demonstrates that Cabinet is committed to using funding across the whole borough. As a further demonstration of this, officers contacted parish and town councils in September 2023 and asked for responses to a proforma by November of 2023 for local ideas for regeneration. This was followed up by further emails and attendance at the Parish Clerks meeting in March 2024. To date, 5 town and parish councils have engaged in the process of identifying projects and schemes potentially suitable for future regeneration funding. 4 of the local councils are in the south of the Borough.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO COUNCIL – PROCEDURE

- Councillors are required to submit a question on notice in writing by 12noon on the eighth working day prior to Council, the title of the question is published on the Council Agenda.
- Questions and responses will be published at the end of the previous working day (usually the Friday prior to a Council meeting on a Monday) and will be available at the Council meeting for Councillors, the press, and the public.
- After the questions and responses are published **Councillors may indicate that they wish to ask a supplementary question by noon on the day of the Council meeting.**
- The Mayor will invite those Councillors who have indicated that they wish to do so to ask a supplementary question.
- The Leader (or relevant Lead Member on behalf of the Leader) or Chair of the Committee is able to respond.

The total time each person can speak on a single q