

COUNCIL – 26TH APRIL 2021

ITEM 10 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

10.1 Councillor Brennan – Litter in Private Residential Areas

Problems with inadequate litter bins, and insufficient or unreliable litter collection by private developers, on land in our Borough where the developer retains responsibility for litter collection, are not new. Whilst the problem has become exacerbated by more residents using outdoor spaces for leisure over lockdown, it would be short sighted to think that the issue will go away when the pandemic ends.

Many such private residential areas, particularly Grange Park, The Chimes and Trinity Gardens in Shelthorpe ward have been blighted by litter that the Council says is not its responsibility. What more can the council do to ensure that private developers meet their responsibilities to deal with this litter. If the Council does not have powers to enforce more frequent collections and / or larger bins, do we need to change our approach to planning conditions around cleanliness on future private developments? Can the Council create enforceable conditions stipulating that developers' cleanliness services must increase when demand increases? Or should we consider taking cleanliness on future developments in-house, and increase Section 106 payments to reflect the future burden on the Council?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Recent coronavirus restrictions have resulted in residents making increased use of their local walks, parks and open spaces. These places have provided an essential outlet for people to get out and enjoy their local outdoor environment. Many places have experienced visitor numbers far in excess of what would normally be expected. Now that other leisure sectors are opening up, we are starting to see a decrease in visitors to our local parks.

The increase in visitor numbers has been welcomed, however, it has presented us with a few challenges, one being the amount of litter being generated. We did experience some littering problems in the early stages of lockdown. Officers and contractors responded to this by changing our resourcing plan to empty the existing network of bins more frequently in litter hotspots. This seems to have resolved the issues. This is being kept under regular review.

There are a number of areas where the Council are not responsible for the collection of litter. This includes private/unadopted roads and open spaces. Some (not all) of these areas are scheduled for future adoption by the Council, however, the transfer may not have taken place yet. This is normally because the developer has not completed their work in that location.

The Council works with private owners of roads/open spaces to ensure that their areas are kept clean and tidy. Any issues reported to officers get referred onto the relevant organisation to try and clean the area as soon as possible. If the landowner does not take the appropriate steps to address any issues, then the Council can take enforcement action against them.

I would suggest that recent events have placed an exceptional strain on our local open spaces. This appears to be easing at the moment, however, if members have any ongoing concerns they should email cleaner.greener@charnwood.gov.uk for advice.

10.2 Councillor Draycott – Leaseholders on Bell Foundry Estate

Could the Cabinet Lead inform Council re Leaseholders on the Bell Foundry Estate, Hastings Ward, Loughborough-

How many Leaseholder are there?

Amounts charged for each over the last 2 years or range of charges?

Why is there a huge spike estimated for 2021/22 some an 800% increase?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

There are 59 leaseholders spread across 38 blocks on the Bell Foundry estate.

All blocks have different service charges and will be billed differently according to the expected expenditure for each year. Planned works, such as decorating, will cause a one-off increase in charges. Major works, such as roof replacements, are invoiced and estimated separately.

Variable service charges are levied under the lease, which is a legally binding agreement between the leaseholder and the Council. Service charging is undertaken in two stages every year. Before the beginning of every financial year an estimate and then an invoice based upon that estimate is sent out to leaseholders, setting out what we believe will be the approximate cost of chargeable services in the forthcoming year. This estimate produces the invoice that represents the 'provisional contribution' as stated in the lease agreement. Later on in the year we calculate what the actual cost of the services were in the previous financial year and that cost is compared with what we invoiced leaseholders for at the time, based on that year's estimate. The difference between what we invoiced for [estimates] and what the actual cost was, be that a credit or debit, is carried forward to the next-produced estimate. This way leaseholders can be sure that they only ever pay for the actual cost of services.

When the actual costs are calculated the amount that the individual leaseholder has to pay (or is owed) includes the actual balance on his or her own account; therefore the service charge payable will vary from each individual not simply because of where that person lives (and as stated the amount of work needed at the block that year will vary) but also the balance on their own payment account. This may affect the perceived percentage increase or decrease in service charges from one year to the next.

The concept of variable service charges is common across landlords across the country. Generally, the Council's leaseholders have a legal responsibility to contribute a reasonable share of the maintenance of the block they occupy. The variable nature of the charge operates in much the same way as a homeowner has variable costs associated with the maintenance of a dwelling i.e. more work is needed some years, than in others. If charges are not levied, then the maintenance would effectively be subsidised by the Council's tenants through their rent payments.

Leaseholders are offered payment plans if they are unable to pay their service charges when due (quarterly) or can defer payments (not available if flats are sub-let).

The following figures are average service charges, including major works. Average actual costs are shown against average estimated costs for the years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Although estimates have been sent out for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, no actuals have yet been calculated) across all leaseholders on the Bell Foundry estate:

2018-2019 estimates: £1,235.87

2018-2019 actuals: £1,237.32

2019-2020 estimates: £ 860.82

2019-2020 actuals: £1,095.72

2020-2021 estimates: £ 687.62

2021-2022 estimates: £ 667.92

Not yet billed [actuals]: 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

10.3 Councillor Draycott - Right to Buy Sales

The Government has announced changes to Right to Buy sales and how that money can now be used to build homes especially social housing. Is the Council serious in setting up a Housing Development Company which is much needed in the Borough?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Government has announced changes to Right to Buy sales and how that money can now be used to build homes especially social housing. Is the Council serious in setting up a Housing Development Company which is much needed in the Borough?

In 2012 the Right to Buy Policy was revised to include provision for Councils to retain a proportion of the receipts to replace dwellings lost through this process. The Policy set out that the Right to Buy receipts can be used to fund up to 30% of the cost of both developing and acquiring properties to be used as affordable housing. The remaining 70% of the costs have to be found from other Council funding.

Right to Buy receipts cannot be used in conjunction with other affordable housing subsidies such as Affordable Housing Grant provided through Homes England, Planning Subsidy such as Commuted Sums and to acquire affordable housing which is to be provided on sites subsidised through Planning Gain.

The Government consultation exercise completed in 2018 and responses published in March 2021 will amend the Council's agreement to reflect the following changes for the use of Right to Buy receipts:

- Increasing the time limit for expenditure of receipts from 3 years to 5*
- Increasing the proportion of development spending permitted to come from Right to Buy receipts from 30% to 40%*
- Allowing Right to Buy receipts to be used to deliver shared ownership homes and First Homes, should we wish to do so*
- Setting a percentage cap on the use of Right to Buy receipts for acquisitions*
- Requiring yearly rather than quarterly pooling returns and payments*

So far the receipts have been used to add to the Council's own housing stock, and there is no necessity to use a Housing Company when utilising Right to Buy receipts in this way, given the relatively low numbers and tenure type.

Should there be an opportunity to invest in delivering larger numbers of homes for different tenure types, rather than social housing, then a case may be made for a delivery vehicle such as a Housing Company to be set up, however the Council does not have any land assets available to develop housing schemes at sufficient volume at present to make a business case for such a company.

The Capital Strategy report considered at Council in February 2021 covered the approach to investment, and Members will be aware that the focus has been on commercial rather than residential properties, using inhouse expertise, which has proved very successful in delivering increased revenue streams to support service delivery.

Please would the Lead Member update the Council on the progress being made in introducing mandatory licensing of all HMOs in Southfields Ward?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Cabinet approved the implementation of an Additional and Selective Licensing Schemes for private rented properties in Charnwood in December 2020.

The Additional Licensing scheme is a borough wide scheme and is for any house in multiple occupation (HMO) which does not already hold a mandatory licence. It will require HMO landlords not covered by the mandatory scheme to apply for a licence. This scheme will cover all HMOs occupied by three or four unrelated persons and buildings converted into self-contained flats where they are occupied by tenants.

The Selective Licensing Scheme requires Secretary of State approval.

The Council recently held consultations on the conditions for both licensing schemes. The consultations on the conditions are in addition to an earlier round of consultation on the schemes.

The intention was to implement the two schemes in April 2021. However, the schemes are expected to be introduced later in the year because the process has taken longer than planned.

Once the Council receive Secretary State approval for the Selective Licensing Scheme, a Public Notice will be issued for both schemes confirming the state date for the schemes.

10.5 Councillor Parton – Accessible Play Equipment

All of the new housing developments in parts of south Loughborough have no facilities for children with a range of physical and mental disabilities. Please would the Lead Member outline what policies currently exist regarding the installation of accessible equipment (as seen in Queens Park) and how the council can utilise S106 monies to retrospectively introduce equipment into these new developments?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Policy Statement 5 (Provision for Children & Young People) of the Council's Open Spaces Strategy states the following objective

“To ensure that the equipment on play spaces and facilities is inclusive, appropriate and stimulating for a range of age groups and abilities and, wherever reasonable, accessible to all.”

The Council works with new developers to ensure that any play equipment provided meets a wide range of service users. When

developers submit detailed designs for play equipment, officers advise them on equipment types and access arrangements to achieve the best outcome possible.

Where the Council is aware of a deficit in accessible equipment it will seek to identify any improvements that can be made and take appropriate steps when the opportunities arise. This may be through the receipt of “offsite” section 106 contributions or through any play facilities renewal programme that the Council may have. It should be noted that, once a section 106 agreement has been signed it can be very difficult to change the purpose of the funding.

Play equipment providers have been remodelling their ranges over recent times to improve the accessibility across their whole range. This is to improve the accessibility of all the equipment that they supply. Whilst this is a step in the right direction, the Council recognised that there may still be accessibility and sensory needs that can only be met through specialist equipment.

If members would like to discuss the provision of play equipment in their area, please email officers at cleaner.greener@charnwood.gov.uk

10.6 Councillor Parton – Monies for Charities during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Council has worked closely with John Storer House and the Bridge Housing charity to form Charnwood Community Action. Please would the Lead Member provide the figure of monies put towards this vital component to reaching the most vulnerable in our borough, along with a list of Charnwood charities assisted during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Council allocated funding of £126,000 to enable the establishment of Charnwood Community Action (CCA) Hub at John Storer House (JSH), including the setting up of a food bank, befriending and wellbeing support, use of the building, vehicles for food collection and delivery, the purchase of food including FareShare membership, volunteer deployment and the hosting of other members of the CCA including other VCS organisations (The Bridge, Charnwood Food Poverty Group, Fearon Hall, Gorse Covert Community Centre). In addition, members of the CCA were successful in generating £78,000 in funding from donations and other external funding to assist with meeting the increased demand at the Hub and continuation of all its services.

The Council has also allocated £64,111, plus assisted with a further allocation of £69,127 of funding received from DEFRA, via Leicestershire County Council, to support the response to the increase in demand to food banks within the Charnwood Food Poverty Group. In addition, the funding increased the capacity for debt advice from CAB, fuel poverty payments via The Bridge and specialist befriending services from Loughborough Wellbeing Centre.

A further £215,000 of Contain Outbreak Management Funding, distributed via Leicestershire County Council, has also been allocated to enable the continuation of the CCA Hub and the associated services provided, including support for food provision and VCS organisations to support individuals being referred to the CCA Hub.

During 2020/21 the Council continued to support Strategic Partners through its Strategic Grants programme and £294,500 was awarded, as approved at Cabinet in January 2020, to enable those organisations to adapt and continue to deliver their services, as far as the regulations allowed, to enable support to continue to be provided. A link to those Strategic Partners is provided : [Cab 16 Jan 2020 Item 08 Charnwood Grants Strategic Partners 2020-21 - 2021-22.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/files/documents/cab_16_jan_2020_item_08_charnwood_grants_strategic_partners_2020-21_-_2021-22.pdf)

In July 2020 the Council ran a VCS Covid 19 Recovery Grant scheme allocating £117,625.88 funding to support 39 VCS organisations during this challenging time. The link provides a table of those funded and the amounts awarded:

https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/vcs_covid_19_recovery_grants_awarded_2020_21/VCS%20Covid-19%20Recovery%20Grants%20-%20Awarded%202020-21.pdf

10.7 Councillor Bolton – A Connected Recovery

A report entitled ‘A Connected Recovery’, published at the end of March 2021 and supported by the ‘All-Party Parliamentary Group’ on loneliness, says the public needs more ‘safe and welcoming’ public spaces to help them reconnect with others.

The report states that there are ‘too many barriers’ preventing people from reconnecting, such as lack of green spaces, public toilets, playing areas, local bus services, and ramps for people with disabilities.

Will Charnwood Borough Council commit to working with Leicestershire County Council to look into how such facilities might be developed, or better used, across Charnwood Borough to help our residents reconnect when lockdown is lifted? Can the lead member and officers also explain the work that is currently being done to prepare residents to return to a post lockdown Charnwood?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Council has developed and adopted Community and Economic Recovery Plans which requires services across the Council to work together with our partners, Parish Councils and LCC. The successful role out of these plans will help to remove perceived barriers and prepare residents to return to our towns and open spaces. The plans include short and long term objectives that will continue throughout the year and beyond.

The Council has employed, High Street Helpers, Street Ambassadors and Security Stewards all of which have been in place to assist residents to visit and use our town centres and open spaces safely. Media campaigns have been effective in building the confidence of residents who have been encouraged to return assisted with up to date public information, physical and digital e.g. websites, social media, videos, street graphics and street dressing.

We plan to continue working closely with our partners LCC, the Police, Parish Councils and Loughborough BID to name a few to make our towns and open spaces feel more attractive, safe and welcoming.

Our current media campaign Shop Safe Shop Local is place to welcome people back to towns across Charnwood and Loughborough while gaining their confidence at the same time. At this moment in time the emphasis is on safety with additional messages to encourage people to shop and eat locally.

The Council is currently working with LCC and the Police to support the hospitality sector in the application of street pavement licences across Charnwood that can be turned around within a week. The objective to help people to meet their families and friends safely outside in line with Government Guidance.

A Loughborough town centre map will be updated to remind people of where they can locate their favourite pub, café restaurant or bar and if they have an outdoor space available. The map will also provide details of parking, entertainment, museums, markets and public toilets.

We know that public toilets are extremely important to residents and visitors of any town and in Loughborough and we are extremely proud to have award-winning facilities in Market Place. There are also a number of other toilet facilities in the town centre - in cafes, restaurants, pubs, bars, and supermarkets (Tesco and Sainsburys); as well as in the Museum, and the Carillon Court shopping centre; Changing Places toilets in the library and Loughborough Leisure Centre (with adjacent parking); and there is another public toilet in Queens Park that is normally open during Park opening times.

The Bedford Square Gateway project due to be completed in November 2021 that will vastly improve the quality of the public realm. It includes the development of safe and welcoming public spaces designed to encourage increased public use and enjoyment.

More long term we wait to hear on the success of the Town Deal application which includes further development of Loughborough Town Centre and its open spaces.

Charnwood has many good quality open spaces for people to enjoy. They have provided an important resource for people during lockdown and gained a greater appreciation amongst residents. The Council works hard to improve and maintain its own open spaces and is proud of its

achievements in obtaining Green Flag Awards and designating an increasing number of Local Natures Reserves (LNR's). The Council published its most recent Open Spaces Strategy in 2019 https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/open_spaces_strategy_2019/Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%2C%202019.pdf which sets challenging targets for the accessibility, quality and quantity of open spaces throughout the Borough. Residents play an important role in improving our local parks and open spaces through several volunteering schemes that we operate. These schemes include the Green Gym which enables residents, who may be socially isolated, to meet regularly.

The Council recognises the importance and impact of loneliness and has appointed a Member Champion for Loneliness.

As Charnwood and it's residents move towards recovery we continue to build on the work of the response to the pandemic and the areas that helped with isolation and loneliness. As part of the immediate response Charnwood Community Action (CCA) Hub was established and included getting food and medicine supplies to people in need and a befriending service via telephone. Officers rang all Charnwood residents over 70 and those shielding as part of welfare checks and signposting to relevant services including befriending support that still continues. This befriending service has successfully recruited over 40 volunteers to support the scheme.

In addition, Loughborough Against Corona established a Neighbourly Scheme, with approximately 100 volunteers, that provided support to individuals, whether that be doing their shopping or collecting prescriptions, which is now part of the CCA support and volunteers continue to support those in need across the borough. Giff Gaff phones were also donated and have been given to isolated members of the community who didn't have access to a phone, to enable them to access services.

Other mutual aid and neighbourly schemes have continued around the borough and have been supported, where needed, through the VCS Development officers, or with grants, to enable the continuation of these services to support local communities.

During this time the Council has supported the Community Centres Group and through the VCS Covid-19 Recovery Grant scheme they have been able to make their premises Covid secure, to enable them to open in accordance with Government guidelines allowing support, carers and other groups / organisations to return to help build that local re-connectivity.

Council Strategic Partners including John Storer Charnwood and Syston Volunteer Centre have continued to offer transport schemes including dial-a-ride services, that enable access to transport for those that require it.

Supported by Council officers the Charnwood Mental Health Forum has continued to meet via Zoom over the last year. Many of the services offered by the forum members help support those that struggle with loneliness and it is often an agenda item. Alongside this the Council through its Charnwood Grants schemes (see response to Q 10.6) has funded a large number of VCS organisations projects and services which it is hoped will start to reopen as we follow the road map to recovery eg: Men in Sheds project, Age Concern Syston.

The Council are already working with Public Health Local Area Co-ordinators, Community Recovery workers and the more recently appointed Social Prescribing Link workers who work in areas of Charnwood and with local GP's, to ensure that there is join up at a local level to ensure that our local communities reconnect in a post lockdown Charnwood.

These are just a few examples to demonstrate the Councils commitment to work with LCC to help our resident reconnect when lockdown is lifted.

10.8 Councillor J Bradshaw – Southfields Offices

Could the Leader update Councillors on progress following the briefing note 17.9.2020, which informed Members that with home working now being more common and some financial challenges, that the prospect of leaving Southfields was likely?

Furthermore, that any capital released from a sale, would be invested in more modern and smaller offices more suited to meet the needs of the Council?

Also, please could the Leader bring us up to date on Southfields current usage?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Preliminary modelling has been undertaken to determine the best course of action regarding the Council's occupation at the Southfield's offices. These do not assume a direction of travel and are being undertaken to identify the most prudent solution. Given their multi-faceted nature, these will take some time to evolve; however, for the short term, Council occupation at Southfields will continue. Future use of capital receipts cannot be determined at this point; they may only be determined at the point when they are received. Southfield's continues to be used as the Council offices, in line with Government COVID guidance, with the addition of the vaccination centre deployed to assist with the pandemic response.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO COUNCIL – PROCEDURE

- Councillors are required to submit a question on notice in writing by 12noon on the sixth 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 question is time limited.