

# Public Document Pack

Simon Young, Solicitor  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services



**To: All Members of the Council**

Dear Councillor

**COUNCIL - TUESDAY, 25TH APRIL, 2017**

Please find attached the following information for the meeting of the Council to be held on Tuesday, 25th April, 2017

**4. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS** (Pages 3 - 8)

To answer any written questions from Councillors

**Note: The deadline for questions was 5pm on Wednesday 19 April 2017 (17.00 hours on the third clear working day before the meeting).**

For further information, please contact Fiona Cotter, tel: 01372 732124 or email: [fcotter@epsom-ewell.gov.uk](mailto:fcotter@epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S Young".

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

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**QUESTION 1**

**Question from Councillor Kate Chinn to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington**

At the Council meeting on 8 December 2015 there was a majority vote to close The Wells opposed by the Labour group. Councillor Romagnuolo asked for an update at the Council meeting on the 18 July 2016 and was advised that plans were going ahead to build much needed housing on the site and a community facility, the Council being in talks with Woking Borough Council to achieve these aims. We were surprised and delighted to hear at this year's budget meeting in February that there has been a decision to spend the agreed money from the sale of The Wells Centre on the Longmead Centre before the monies have been realized.

Please could the Chair advise the Council of the current cost or income from the building, are the last proposed plans the same? And what is the expected timescale of any development when no noticeable progress has been achieved to date?

**Reply:**

I thank Councillor Kate Chinn for her question. I can confirm that there was a majority for the consolidation of the Borough community centre facilities on one site, with a capital injection of £70,000 to expand and improve the facilities. It was also a majority for developing the Wells site for much needed housing and including the provision of a new community facility to be managed by the residents of the Wells. Finally it was a majority for making much more efficient and effective use of the Council's resources thus saving the council taxpayer money. I agree with you that the Labour Group voted against those changes.

The anticipated full year costs for The Wells are £44,740 (net). This is made up of utilities, cleaning, business rates, maintenance and insurance costs. In addition as the social centre element of the building ceased on March 31 some of the closure costs fell into this financial year. Lettings fees came to £11,550 for the same period.

It remains the Council's intention to redevelop the Wells for much needed housing and a community facility. Productive discussions have been held with Woking Borough Council and we are currently exploring whether it would be in the Council's best financial interests if it offered the Wells as part of a package of potential development sites to the market. We expect to bring a committee paper forward in the next 3-6 months and if approved, would seek to market the sites for a development partner by the calendar year end.

## **QUESTION 2**

### **Question from Councillor Rob Geleit to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett**

The Labour group visits the residents in Court ward each weekend knocking on doors throughout the year to hear about their views and issues. A constant complaint is the low level consistent anti-social behaviour that negatively impacts on their quality of life: littering, fly tipping, dog fouling, a few young people causing nuisance in a particular area.

May I ask if the Committee has considered utilizing the powers of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 to work in partnership with the police to manage these behaviors? If the Committee has considered the use of the powers, please could Councillor Beckett advise why it decided not to pursue their use and their knowledge of the thoughts of the local police on their possible utilization?

### **Reply:**

Councillor Geleit will recall that at the Environment Committee on 31 January 2017 we agreed to use the power in the 2014 Act to make Public Space Protection Orders in order to help the Police deal with alcohol-related anti-social behaviour.

Another report to that same committee emphasized our commitment to dealing, within our limited resources, with anti-social behaviour - working to best effect between different Council teams. We also reaffirmed our commitment to work with the Police and others where appropriate.

Contrary to Councillor Geleit's assertion, officers have used powers under the 2014 Act, as well as other legislation to deal with some of the issues highlighted by his question. Where issues are raised, we do consider whether it is possible or appropriate for action to be taken. The process for issue of Community Protection Notices under the Act requires that we first issue a warning letter. We have issued a number of such warning letters, and on each occasion the recipient has complied. Using powers under other legislation we have, for example, issued notices in relation to littering and fly-tipping, including fixed penalty notices. In relation to other areas, such as dog fouling, we have tried to use education to change behaviour, and we will continue to do so.

Unfortunately, there will always be some people who do not behave responsibly, and we will not be able to solve every issue. However, we play our part in dealing with problems that are reported to us.

**QUESTION 3**

**Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington**

Could the Chairman please update us regarding the negotiations with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and Surrey County Council for the re-siting of the Fire Station within Epsom Borough?

**Reply:**

The Borough Council is currently in the process of carrying out a partial review of its Core Strategy - a key part of the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan. This provides an opportunity for the County Council and Fire Service to work positively with the Borough Council in the identification, consideration and allocation of a new site for a fire station. The County Council has been encouraged to engage with this process. Potential site allocation options for a new fire station site will be brought before the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee for consideration as and when appropriate; they will also be subject to public consultation prior to submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of examination in public.

**QUESTION 4**

**Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett**

As the responsibility for caring for trees on public land has been returned to Surrey County Council, does the Borough have plans to offer a service to residents which would enable trees to be replaced either by residents associations, County Councillors, fund raising or private individuals?

**Reply:**

It is important that we continue to work with Surrey County Council to find a cost effective solution to replenish the stock where it dies or becomes damaged or diseased. With the County Council taking back the responsibility of their asset - highway trees - officers of the Borough and County Councils have recently met to discuss a mechanism by which new trees can continue to be planted where funding is available and the cost to this Council is kept to an absolute minimum. I therefore anticipate that a proposed scheme for street tree planting will be reported to my Committee in the autumn.

### **QUESTION 5**

#### **Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Barry Nash**

Could the Council confirm why £120,000 has been prioritised to pay for the refurbishment of the pond in Rosebery Park and where has the money come from?

#### **Reply:**

The capital works to Rosebery Park Pond were reported to the Financial Policy Panel and agreed by the Community & Wellbeing Committee and Council in February 2017, following a detailed business case and project appraisal, which was agreed by the Capital Member Group.

The work was considered a priority by the Capital Member Group for health & safety reasons and in the public interest, as the pond is collapsing and water washing out on to the pathway and perimeter.

The Capital Member Group has strict criteria and only considers projects that are either a priority, or invest to save.

The approved capital funding for the work comes from the capital reserves and has been included in the Capital Programme for 2017/18, (approved by Council in February 2017) which is funded from a mixture of capital receipts, S106 receipts and capital grants.

### **QUESTION 6**

#### **Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett**

The cost of parking in Epsom is higher than all our surrounding towns and whilst we who live in Epsom support Epsom's economy, how will this cost encourage visitors to also support Epsom's economy above that of our surrounding neighbours?

#### **Reply:**

I am afraid I must disagree with Councillor Mountain and her Conservative colleagues on this subject as car park usage is heavily dependent on what shops, restaurants and leisure activities are on offer in the local vicinity.

Councillor Mountain's generalized assertion about car parking charges in neighbouring boroughs is incorrect and after investigation here are some of the facts. The prices at the Ashley Centre, for example, as Epsom's largest car park, compare favourably to similar car park offerings in Sutton and Kingston and also with the NCP car park in Epsom. Charges in Guildford or Woking are cheaper than the Ashley Centre for shorter stays but, for stays

longer than 2 hours, Epsom is cheaper. Reigate is cheaper than the Ashley Centre (although other car park options in Epsom compare favourably to those in Reigate). Dorking and Leatherhead do offer cheaper parking options but have different retail offerings. Epsom town centre car parks also offer a combined flat evening and overnight rate from 4pm of either £2 or £2.50, depending on the car park, which supports the evening retail and leisure economy within the Borough.

In accordance with our car park strategy you can park in the Town Hall car park for a short stay visit of up to 30 minutes for £1 or for a long stay visit you can use Hook Road car park all day for £3.50 (Parker card) supporting both quick visits (i.e. Fast food, click and collect etc.) or all day stays (commuters, shoppers or people who work in Epsom). In 2016/17 visitor numbers increased in Hook Road by 5% on the previous year and in Town Hall/Hope Lodge the increase in visitor numbers was 13%.

In 2016/17 there were over 1.85 million visits to Epsom & Ewell pay to park car parks. The Council has a finite number of car park spaces so it is important to make sure each space is managed correctly. We have to make the best use of this resource as an income generator to fund some of the important services for residents while at the same time encourage the economic vitality of our town centers but also maintaining the car parks in good order. It is also worth noting that approximately 66% of the income generated by the car parks is re-invested into their management, maintenance and improvement.

What Councillor Mountain has appeared to forget whilst asking this question is that the cost of providing our car parks in 2017/2018 went up by £124,000 due the additional tax burden of the Conservative Government's business rate re-valuation. The small number of car park charge increases that were applied this year will only raise, at best, £112,000 leaving us a £12,000 further shortfall. So despite losing all £417k of our Revenue Support Grant the E&E Conservatives believe that the general council taxpayer should subsidize car parks rather than the cost be covered by the users. As usual Councillor Mountain fails to target the real source of rising costs – the Conservative Government.

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