

Council
20 February 2018

QUESTION 1

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

What general determinants are used by Council Officers to assess the viability of applying for a grant?

Reply:

In general, Officers would be expected to consider the following points when assessing the viability of applying for a grant. These are general considerations and not an exhaustive list: specific grants may require specific determinants.

- Would the grant help the Council achieve its objectives?
- Does the Council have the resources to progress the grant application and (if successful) to administer the grant?
- Could the Council meet the grant criteria?
- The probability of the application being successful
- Could the Council administer the grant to achieve value for money?
- Are there any equality/diversity considerations?
- Could the Council meet any expenditure conditions attached to the grant?
- What reporting would be required after securing a grant?
- Any other implications of securing, or not securing, the grant.

QUESTION 2

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

Is the Council adopting a pro-active or passive approach to the empty shops in the high street, and if pro-active, what are the steps being taken to attract suitable commercial enterprises?

Reply:

I am replying to this question as the content is more closely linked to the policy decision of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

The Council takes a strategic approach to promoting the vitality and viability of Epsom Town Centre. This signals to traders looking to locate in Epsom that it is a good place in which to do business.

Following the adoption of the Plan E Area Action Plan in 2011 the Borough Council has:

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- Actively promoted and financially supported a £3.7million investment that is now being implemented and will gradually transform the appearance of the public realm, in particular the market area.
- Promoted a Civic Investment Fund offers businesses the opportunity to bid for funding to improve their shopfronts.
- Supported the establishment of a Business Improvement District that will provide an additional £1.5million over 5 years for businesses to invest in the town centre.
- Adopted a positive and proactive approach to the Epsom Square development.
- Supported the principle of the conversion of upper-floors to residential use and approved several such schemes that have brought a large amount of underutilized floor space back into beneficial use, increasing the potential number of users of the local businesses.
- Protected valuable employment floor space that helps to generate high-spending footfall throughout the day.
- Approved the development of new flats and the creation of two new hotels.
- Approved a new Supermarket in Upper High Street.

It is worth noting that, even in the depths of the recent recession, Epsom High Street has performed well compared with many other town centres. The number of vacant units has been maintained at low levels and there are very few long-term empty shops. The Borough Council monitors vacancy levels and the current “churn” rate is very low. This is all testament to the success of the Borough Council’s proactive strategy for the town centre.

QUESTION 3

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kingston

How environmentally friendly is the Council’s energy usage? i.e. sourcing (whether by self-generation or by procurement from sustainable energy firms), usage (energy efficient systems or number of electric vehicles within the current fleet) and planning (is there a viable strategy in place for the future).

Reply:

The Council has undertaken a number of initiatives designed to make our energy usage environmentally friendly. These include:

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Smart Meters: We have smart meters on many site locations for gas, electricity and water, these are monitored and managed under a dashboard system.

PV panels: Installed on Longmead Depot to generate renewable energy and we get paid a tariff for electricity we do not use.

Procurement of energy: We procure energy via two consortiums and our buildings are split between them, Improva Energy and Laser (Kent County Council). They procure energy in bulk direct from the supplier for many councils and companies. This gives them good buying power and better rates than we could get on our own.

Electric vehicles: As part of our fleet replacement contract the option to use electric vans was explored but unfortunately the costs were prohibitive.

In regard to the future, our usage, our costs and our commitment to environmental good practice will continue to be monitored so that we achieve both value for money for council taxpayers and environmentally sustainable energy usage wherever possible.

QUESTION 4

Question from Councillor Omer Kokou-Tchri to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kingston

There is a real anger in the community regards to the closure of the Wells.

My understanding is without a clear yet and incoherent alternate development proposed, hence the possible alternative might be challenging with the proposed 25 units with one car space per unit let alone achieve others claimed objectives.

There might be further nowhere for the playground to go, and insufficient space for a viable business case for the new Community Centre which is been proposed especially as they would have to fit into this a kitchen and toilet facility to be able to rent space out.

1. With the planned increases in houses across the Borough we will need more Community Space; So why build one on the same site and reducing the current capacity and facilities space and with existing appropriate management and strategic partnerships?
2. Would the Council be putting in place a thorough and open scrutinised processes in place and the appropriate public consultations including allowances of counter independent alternatives before any final decisions are made?

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Reply:

The Council has a clear and coherent policy for the redevelopment of the Wells site, which provides for much needed private and affordable accommodation, a new community facility for self-management by the residents, and a cost saving for the council taxpayer. In regard to the two questions:

1. The decision to consolidate EEBC's social centre provision was debated and approved at an earlier Council meeting in December 2015. Being located at the centre of an existing housing estate, the Wells site lends itself to providing the Borough and its residents with much needed housing for private and affordable occupation. The Council will need to optimise the amount of development on all such suitable potential housing sites in response to the Government's overriding imperative to drive-up housing delivery and their calculation that we will need to build 579 dwellings per year under the emerging Local Plan.
2. The decision to retain the site ensures that the Council (or its wholly owned trading company), retains control to provide a community facility of up to 1,500 sq ft (to be operated and managed by the community) and that as much affordable housing can be delivered as possible. PwC has been engaged to advise whether the Council or its wholly owned trading company undertakes the development.

The community will be consulted initially by the Council (or its wholly owned trading company) as land owner (pre-planning) and then by the Council (post planning application) in its capacity as the Local Planning Authority. The externally appointed Professional Team (acting on behalf of the Council as land owner or its wholly owned trading company) will consist of Architects, a Cost Consultant and Planning Consultant under the coordination of a Development Manager. The Professional Team will work up a planning application and will consider all development factors including (but not limited to) parking, the playground and the Right of Way.