

**QUESTION 1**

**Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Barry Nash**

Would it be possible to have an update as to the test of new vehicles for meals on wheels/community support?

**Reply:**

From our analysis of requirements for Route Call, Meals on Wheels and Community Alarm Services:

With reference to Route Call, we will be replacing our current combination of four custom-built accessible vehicles carrying 11 people with four factory-built Mercedes Sprinters, which are 14 seater accessible vehicles with removable seats to make room for wheelchairs. These new vehicles will also provide the added benefit of two luggage areas for shopping trolleys and these vehicles have been ordered within the new transport contract and expected to be operational by April/May 2017.

Concerning the provision of Meals on Wheels and the Community Alarm Services, we have three Citroen Nemo vans, which are leased through the transport contract and these vehicles are not being replaced due to low mileage. Therefore, the lease on these vehicles has been extended, as the best value option for the service.

**QUESTION 2**

**Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett**

How many notices have the CEOs given out for parking offences in January?

**Reply:**

I thank Councillor Clarke for his question. I am assuming that the question relates to January this year in which case the answer is 984.

**QUESTION 3**

**Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett**

Why was the pick-up for Christmas trees scheduled so late?

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**Reply:**

The collection for Christmas trees started on the 9 January 2017 and finished on the 30 January 2017.

Christmas Trees are classed as garden waste. It is the Council's standard practice to suspend the garden waste service over the Christmas period to increase the Council's capacity for general waste collection and use the vehicles for that purpose.

The week commencing 9 January 2017 was the first full week for all types of collections after the Christmas break and therefore the first week that garden waste collections were running.

**QUESTION 4**

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

Alongside the BID what other measures are the Council pursuing to improve the economic vibrancy of the Borough? Not just Epsom High Street but Ewell Village, Stoneleigh Broadway and all the other little parades of shops which bring much benefit, colour and employment to the Borough?

**Reply:**

I am pleased to confirm that the Borough Council has a clear policy commitment and a positive focus on improving the economic vibrancy of the Borough.

As Councillor Clarke will recall we adopted a Borough-wide Economic Development Strategy in April of last year. The Borough's Economic Vitality Officer's Group meets regularly to provide a sustained focus on its delivery. In particular, the Council employs the services of an Economic Development Officer, Julia Owen, and she plays a key role in coordinating efforts in this area. The Strategy is broad and is not solely about the emerging BID. Nonetheless, Epsom Town Centre is the major centre within the Borough and we are currently putting resources into getting the BID off the ground. Against the backdrop of a national decline of town centres and high street retailers in the face of the boom in internet and mobile shopping the Boroughs retail centres as a whole have been holding up well.

Unfortunately in 2017 many of our hard pressed retail businesses will be hit hard by the Conservative Government's business rate revaluation, which will come into effect from April this year. Increased business rates will make it harder for our businesses to compete with internet retailers, of course, and we may find more struggling.

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However, and whilst there is much gloom in many high streets across the country, I am sure all Members will join me in saying how pleasing it is to see so much development in Epsom town centre that will bring more footfall. The most recent example is the work to the Ebbisham Centre and Derby Square which will help to attract more people to our town.

The Plan E road changes will also help increase footfall across the town centre. Currently footfall is focused more around the Ashley Centre and the market place, but it declines rapidly after the Spread Eagle and on the north side of the High Street because the busy roads form a barrier to movement. Therefore improving the junctions – making it easier to cross the roads – will mean people stay longer in the town centre and visit more shops and businesses. In addition, improving the public realm – paving, seating, and lighting – will make our town an even better place to visit, to eat and to shop. I am grateful to the Borough Council's Place Development Team for facilitating these important changes.

A great deal of work goes on behind the scenes by the Council to establish business need and development potential. Place Development convenes a number of meetings to bring together key partners to drive footfall. For instance, there has recently been a meeting with commercial agents in the town centre to share intelligence on vacant premises and the needs of businesses looking to come to the Borough. Business Leaders' Breakfasts are also organised by the Borough Council and provide focus on some of the key issues of mutual interest.

Building on key partnerships is important to securing the necessary funding and collective effort to make things happen. To this end, the Borough Council is a member of the Gatwick Diamond initiative and the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership. With Surrey County Council, we have secured bids for key infrastructure funding and continue to make representations and provide endorsement where possible to shape and influence key decisions relating to the future development of our area and there is regular engagement with other key stakeholders such as South West Trains and health service providers.

There is coordination between those involved in marketing and events in the Borough. The Council's Market Manager works with "What's On in Epsom", "The Best of Epsom & Ewell" and the Ashley Centre and is also coordinating with the Bid Steering Board. They coordinate and assist each other in putting on events and making them bigger and better through joint endeavour. This has helped to improve the offer in Epsom town centre and the quality of the events held such as the Derby Festival, the Town Fayres, the Ashley Centre Light Switch On event and the Council's own Light Switch On Event, supported and managed by members of Council staff who go above and beyond the call of duty so our residents can have fun and our businesses can benefit from the increased footfall.

This is an impressive effort by our officers and I am grateful to the Place Development staff and the Operations Team for their work to help facilitate

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these important footfall drivers, as well as also to the Environmental Health and Licensing teams for their key contributions. I am sure that Councillor Clarke will wish to endorse these comments.

Free parking on the Sundays in the run up to Christmas is another example of what the Council is doing to help drive footfall, along with free publicity through Borough Insight for “Ewell Yule” and “Lights on Broadway”. Further investment in Christmas Lights across the Borough has also helped make our centres more attractive to Christmas shoppers.

Working with the traders associations in Stoneleigh Broadway and Ewell Village we assisted with an application for funding from Surrey County Council for small capital improvements under the Community Improvements Fund. Following traders meetings, walkabouts with traders and a survey the Town Centre Manager submitted two separate bids for funding. Unfortunately, and disappointingly, Surrey County Council did not award any funding to Stoneleigh. However the traders in Ewell Village secured funding for new planters, screening – and importantly new signage. In addition I am also very pleased to report that the Town Centre Manager was successful in gaining £12,000 – the highest amount possible – from Tesco’s Bags of Help Fund which will see improvements to the entrance to The Grove. These works are on-going and despite the recent departure of Alanna Coombes to an exciting role in the City of London, the projects that she put in train will be followed through with support from other members of the Place Development Team.

Another Borough Council initiative is the shop front improvement grant which has seen the transformation of buildings and which has greatly benefitted the surrounding businesses and made for more attractive centres.

Importantly the Council has put in place Article 4 directions in town centres to stop offices being turned into apartments – so preventing the dormitory town effect where town centres lose the office worker footfall. These Article 4 directions have also been put in place to protect shops being turned into more nail bars, estate agents, and coffee shops. You can have too much of a good thing.

With the business community and key agencies, the Borough Council can help to create an environment for our centres to thrive and I’m proud of the work of the Council in doing so. If Councillor Clarke requires hard evidence that these combined efforts are working then he only has to you look at what is happening in Epsom town centre right now: White Stuff, Prezzo, Kiko and Pets at Home have all recently opened and Pret a Manger are expected to open later this year. In Ewell Village, traders have agreed upon a Ewell Renewal plan to revitalise parts of the centre and they are currently working on the implementation of that. Despite the loss of a bank and some other challenges, the business community is fighting back with support from the Borough Council. Likewise Stoneleigh traders have identified some improvements which can be implemented as funding becomes available.

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In conclusion, most local centres are relatively healthy and vibrant and, whilst the I am not complacent, it is gratifying to see that we have such a broad range of independent traders and successful entrepreneurial endeavour in our Borough.