

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question 1

Mr Chris Ramsden to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Financial Sustainability:

The council has been wise to re-examine the current business plans for the impact of Covid and Brexit. If I am not mistaken, the capital budget over the next 4 years is 120M which is a considerable amount of money, and if borrowed at existing interest rates would lead to an annual finance charge of just under 6M which is roughly 40% council tax income. If any of these figures are wrong, I am of course happy to be corrected. In the interests of prudent financial management and Council taxpayer buy in, all business plans should be independently, objectively and transparently reviewed by publishing as much information as possible so that interested Council tax payers are able to assess the position and that they are assured that the plans are robust to future changes, likely to achieve the benefits and planned returns, and that the risks of non-achievement are manageable. In my attempts to achieve this, my brief investigations have encountered a number of issues including entire documents being restricted and missing figures. In order for such a review to occur:

- All business plans currently being re-examined should be published. If there is a need to restrict any content, then they should be published in a way that minimises the restriction to sensitive data only.
- All published business plans should contain figures for Top line (total revenue), broken down into components, the various deductions, and the bottom line (council contribution surplus/subsidy). Various deductions includes figures for direct costs, indirect costs, staff costs, financing costs, and service costs as separate line items.

The council Tax payer (as end customer, ultimate funder and risk taker) requires from the review assurances that

- There is high confidence that the top and bottom line figures are achievable, and that any risks of non-achievement are manageable
- all assumptions are valid over a time period of at least the duration of the loans.
- The plans are robust with respect to any future long term Covid consequences and new trends including possible changes to car parking needs, cinema going use, retail shopping habits and EH residents working at home etc.

Please will the council

1. publish the business plans as openly and transparently as possible (along the lines above) in a report to Council
2. perform an independent open, and objective review that publishes as a report the answer to the question "What assurances can the council give that each business plans is viable and that, for example, an independent hard-nosed business person would invest in each project"?

Question 2

Yvonne Estop-Wood, representative of the Bishop's Stortford Climate Change Group, to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:

The Bishops Stortford Climate Change group is very concerned that the planning white paper seriously threatens your policy-making role as Local Planning Authority, and gives unconstrained freedoms to developers. Can you let us know what representations you have made to the government challenging the white paper?

Question 3

Mr Martin Adams to ask Cllr Linda Haysey, Leader:

I consider that the published policies Map being presented today is inaccurate because a part of it was not a part of the normal Plan adoption process. I am referring to a change to the village boundary at Millers View, Much Hadham. My research indicates that it was not consulted upon, or presented to Council for adoption. I believe it was added entirely as a staff initiative.

As per my two letters to Mr Cassidy I consider this to be a significant change, and that it has not been handled in a Democratic fashion. I have repeatedly put forward questions about this change that have never been answered, as per my second letter to Mr Cassidy.

I would request that this Boundary change is withdrawn by staff because it was drafted after the Plan was adopted. Failing that I would like to see the matter opened up for proper consultation, so that my unanswered questions (as per my second letter) can be considered alongside comments from other interested parties.

Staff have always dealt with my queries politely and respectfully, but I believe their overall response has been to say 'We're sorry that it happened this way, but we won't consider changing it'.

I would ask Council to support the request that I make above. This would ensure fairness, consistency of decision making and ensure proper consultation about Planning Decisions.