

**North Somerset Council
Council Meeting 23 May 2023
Question Time (Agenda Item 22)**

Question 1

From Councillor Keating

To Executive Member for highways and transport – Councillor Hannah Young:

Update on requests via the Highways Improvement Request system

Councillor Keating asked the Executive Member the following question:

” Will Councillor Young commit to providing a regular update on progress against requests on the Highways Improvement Request system?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Keating for his question and responded that she would undertake to work to put this in place.

Question 2

From Councillor Charles

To The Leader – Councillor Bell

Portishead Post Office

Councillor Charles asked the Leader the following question:

“I would like to thank Councillor Bell for the support he has given to Portishead in its efforts to bring back a functioning post office to the town. I ask that he continues to use all available resources to help North Somerset’s second largest town regain an essential resource.”

Councillor Bell thanked Councillor Charles for his question and agreed to commit his support to the continuing campaign to restore a post office back in Portishead.

Question 3

From Councillor Payne

To Executive Member for highways and transport – Councillor Hannah Young

Weston Central Liveable Neighbourhood Scheme

Councillor Payne asked the following question of the Executive Member:

“The Weston Central Liveable Neighbourhood Scheme was extensively consulted on and received very positive feedback from the local community. The Government money which was secured to pay for it was originally supposed to have been spent in the last financial year. But the scheme seems to be continually delayed, and still has no timescale for delivery.

Residents' expectations were raised with the consultation that the improvements will be delivered, but they have seen nothing happening since that consultation and many have got the impression that it has been kicked into the long grass. Could you assure me and other residents of central Weston of the council's commitment to the implementation of the scheme; and give me a date when we will see some real progress?"

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Payne for his question and confirmed the council's commitment to the scheme. She confirmed that it was due to be implemented in July or August 2023 with the final scheme being shared with members in early June or July 2023 prior to that implementation. She added that there would be communication with the community to raise awareness of the details before the scheme was put in place.

Question 4

**From Councillor Crockford-Hawley
To The Leader – Councillor Bell**

Closure of Odeon Cinema in Weston and future of the building and Compton organ

Councillor Crockford-Hawley asked the Leader the following question:
"I am concerned about a very large cinema pipe organ in the Odeon Cinema which was played for the last time on Sunday. The Odeon Cinema is due to close on 5 June. What is the council doing to help keep both this Art Deco building and the iconic organ?"

Councillor Bell thanked Councillor Crockford-Hawley for his question and agreed with his concern over the future of the building and the pipe organ. He had already written to the Odeon to ask for a senior level meeting to understand their intentions regarding the future of the site. A team of officers were already looking at options for the building to make sure that it was not put at risk. He said the council would do all that it could to support the community in campaigning to save the building and protect the pipe organ.

Question 5

**From Councillor Petty
To Executive Member for spatial planning, placemaking and economy –
Councillor Mark Canniford**

Local Plan and housing numbers

Councillor Petty asked the Executive Member what was next for the Local Plan and whether the unrealistic housing numbers from central government would be disregarded in favour of a realistic number based on North Somerset's housing needs?

Councillor Canniford thanked Councillor Petty for her question and responded that he agreed with her view that the Local Plan was a suite of policies that shaped the type

of homes and locations to be developed. He believed also that the housing number was too high for North Somerset but the number to be built was a decision for the full Council. He would continue to work on a lower, more appropriate housing needs number rather than the number set by central government and wanted to work with members to identify a number given the constrained approach to development in North Somerset that had already been identified.

Question 6

From Councillor McQuillan

**To Executive Member for spatial planning, placemaking and economy –
Councillor Mark Canniford**

Green Belt development in Abbots Leigh

Councillor McQuillan asked the following question of the Executive Member:
“We have heard concerns tonight about this 24 acre green belt development off the A369 between Leigh Woods and the neighbouring ward of Abbots Leigh.

The scale of this development could set a precedent for similar or even bigger schemes around the country, and I think we can all agree that this requires proper scrutiny, particularly considering the potential highways safety issues and the use of shipping containers in the green belt.

Given this, can you please outline what the council has done, and what it will do, to make sure this matter is being looked at thoroughly and carefully with proper advice, and how residents’ will be able to engage with this process.”

Councillor Canniford thanked Councillor McQuillan for his question and replied that there had been two applications made in relation to the scheme. One was in respect of the containers which officers had concluded required a planning application and the second was in relation to the allotments themselves. Councillor Canniford shared Councillor McQuillan’s concern around traffic movements and legal advice was being sought on the matter of the allotments. He believed that members and the public should be given the opportunity to give their views and scrutinise the application, but the council was required to adhere to planning law.

Question 7

From Councillor Bryant

To The Leader – Councillor Bell

Fines to motorists using the prohibited areas in the Bus Hub in Weston-s-Mare

Councillor Bryant asked the Executive Member whether there were any proposals to lower the numbers of motorists being fined for using the prohibited areas in the Bus Hub in Weston-s-Mare.

Councillor Bell replied that when the enforcement scheme was first introduced the ward members engaged closely to ensure good quality signage and driver information. No fines had been issued for the first couple of months when the enforcement was in place and informative letters were sent to those motorists who had inadvertently driven through the hub during that time. There had been extensive publicity which led to further signage improvements including large letters on the road surface itself. The fines were in place to maintain the space effectively for pedestrians and bus traffic and used to further improve bus services. Councillor Bell offered to have a conversation with Councillor Bryant if he had specific suggestions on how the signage could be further improved.

Question 8

From Councillor Shopland

To Executive Member for homes and health – Councillor Jenna Ho Marris

Council rodent and vermin control policy

Councillor Shopland asked whether the council had a rodent and vermin control policy and if so, whether details could be made easily and freely available to the public.

Councillor Ho Marris thanked Councillor Shopland for his question and advised that the council did have such a policy and that she believed it could be made available to the public.

Question 9

From Councillor Ellis

**To Executive Member for spatial planning, placemaking and economy –
Councillor Mark Canniford**

Nailsea Uplands

Councillor Ellis asked the Executive Member why a council-owned field in the Uplands in Nailsea had been developed for housing when it could have been kept green for the benefit of residents given that other surrounding fields had been granted planning permission for housing.

Councillor Canniford thanked Councillor Ellis for his question and replied that the council had a responsibility to act on all residents' needs. The piece of land in question was deemed feasible for development and had gained the correct planning permission. The development would be of high quality and provide 30% affordable housing for people in the Nailsea area. Nailsea residents would be made aware first of the availability via the town council.

Question 10

From Councillor Cartman

To Executive Member for highways and transport – Councillor Hannah Young

Long Ashton bypass bus lane

Councillor Cartman asked the Executive Member whether she knew whether a review would be held of lessons learned and changes made in advance of a similar scheme to be implemented on the road into Portishead. He believed the Long Ashton scheme had been implemented with proper process and consideration.

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Cartman for his question and responded that she would take his question away and come back with an answer in due course.

Question 11

From Councillor Williams

To Executive member for children’s services, families, and life-long learning – Councillor Catherine Gibbons

Councillor Williams asked the Executive Member what was being done and in what timescale to improve the Ofsted rating for children’s services at North Somerset following a recent Ofsted review.

Councillor Gibbons thanked Councillor Williams for his question and noted that the Ofsted report showed that services “required improvement to be good” rather than being “inadequate”. She advised that the council was not where it wanted to be but that there had been praise for the strategic vision the council had for its children’s services and that the council knew itself and understood its weaknesses. She noted the significant challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff but the council’s wished to be “good” if not “outstanding” and she welcomed any input from Councillor Williams.