

Questions from Councillors under Rule 12

Questioner	Question	Answer
<p>Councillor Edwards</p>	<p>I see a further £74k has been put in the capital budget in 2023/24 for the completion of the conversion into six flats of the council owned York Buildings.</p> <p>1. Is this going to be the final expenditure and what will the final cost outcome be for this conversion compared with the original budget?</p> <p>2. What was the total loan taken out and what is ongoing annual cost of interest payments to the council for these loans and what is the term over which they are being repaid?</p> <p>3. What is the nett monthly rental charge to be made for each flat when they are finally rented out to local homeless persons and what is the nett budgeted annual surplus, after costs, due to the council?</p>	<p>Councillor Evans:</p> <p>Yes, it will be the final expenditure on the conversion. We can only answer on the final cost compared to the budget once the final invoices have been settled.</p> <p>The Council does not take out individual loans for each capital scheme. Instead, it looks at the totality of its borrowing requirements and makes appropriate arrangements based on the Capital Financing Requirement. This could involve using our own cashflows and reserves to undertake internal borrowing to avoid incurring external interest costs from a lender.</p> <p>When appraising projects, we need to include a cost of borrowing and therefore a notional interest and MRP cost is calculated for the purposes of scheme appraisal. The calculation of the costs would be based on the expected useful life of the asset and the prevailing PWLB interest rate for a loan of that duration at the time.</p> <p>So, in summary there is no specific loan relating to York Buildings so we are unable to provide an interest rate or duration.</p> <p>The rent for York Buildings must be an “affordable rent” (under the conditions of grant funding we have received from Homes England). Affordable rent is 80% of market rent – the final figure has not yet been calculated or agreed.</p>

<p>Councillor Haffenden</p>	<p>Last full council it was answered that we spend around 40% more on hiring agency staff for the street cleansing team. Can you please let me know the exact amount extra we have spent on agency staff for the street cleansing team since the service was brought in house to date compared to how much it would of cost if we hired directly.</p>	<p>Councillor Roark:</p> <p>Without considering every situation where an agency member of staff has been used it is impossible to make the comparison of what it would have cost just using directly hired staff. Due to the nature of the service there are times when agency staff are used because an increase is required for a short period of time. Equally agency staff are brought in to cover sickness, and annual leave.</p> <p>However, I can say that since June 2019, the council has spent £421,996 on agency staff, of which roughly £170,000 make up agency fees.</p>
<p>Councillor Jobson</p>	<p>Over the last 2 months our living environment has been severely tested with the recent floods in Hastings becoming more frequent. If we look back over the last few years we have been experiencing flooding in the town centre, which has affected the town hall, Queens Road, and now South Terrace.</p> <p>December 2022 was the first big warning in the town centre for emergency services to help and then January's extreme rainfall came, which affected residents moving out of their homes in South Terrace.</p> <p>Can our council prioritise and bring forward an urgent investigation on recent flooding and make an urgent report to work together with southern water and other agencies to really begin to mitigate and make an urgent climate action framework for the future of Hastings.</p>	<p>Councillor Barnett:</p> <p>The Council has already asked the lead authority for flood investigation, East Sussex County Council to undertake an investigation into the causes of the recent flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act.</p> <p>Initial meetings have already been held with Southern Water Senior Management, (and are being scheduled with the Environment Agency) to robustly set out local concerns and our expectation that actions are taken urgently to plan for and mitigate any further extreme weather events this winter, and, in addition, once the full causes of the recent flooding are understood, that planning and works are undertaken to future proof our town centre against future impacts of extreme weather patterns.</p> <p>As the council does not have statutory duties around flood management, it does not have any staff resources to undertake this work – the budget proposals to be discussed next week has identified a budget for climate emergency mitigation, and an appropriate first call on this budget, if it is agreed, could be a resource to undertake this work.</p>

<p>Councillor Foster</p>	<p>In Oct 2021 the council unanimously accepted the motion as set out below:</p> <p>‘To help tackle the climate emergency, the council install secure electric bike charging points at strategic points around the town.</p> <p>E-bike charging points will be part of a comprehensive programme supporting cycling to include a bicycle and e-bike hire scheme, and storage shelters where charging points can be safely available. This programme requires national funding and the agreement of ESCC Highways to progress.’</p> <p>Can the leader or portfolio holder please supply an update on progress to date?</p>	<p>Councillor Roark:</p> <p>As the October 2021 motion made clear, “This programme requires national funding and the agreement of ESCC Highways to progress.” Hastings Borough Council has no dedicated staff resources exploring cycling infrastructure – unless as part of a wider regeneration or externally-funded public realm scheme.</p> <p>The costs associated with a scheme large enough to make it financially viable are unaffordable to the council at the present time. Ideally, we need a large corporation or grant funding to deliver. This is something that we would likely need to do in partnership with Rother District Council to be able to offer a large enough project to attract commercial operators.</p> <p>We welcome commercial proposals for such a scheme; any proposals would need to be cost-neutral to the Council. When exploring potential regeneration schemes, officers are aware of the need to consider cycling infrastructure, though to date most exploration has been at a level of park and ride or cycle hire scheme not one focused solely on e-bike infrastructure and no projects have come forward as viable at the present time.</p>
<p>Councillor Hilton</p>	<p>How are you intending to measure and minimise the embedded carbon impact of the Town Deal and potentially Homes England projects over the coming years? What metrics will be used to monitor this?</p>	<p>Councillor Barnett:</p> <p>There are 13 projects being delivered under the Towns Fund programme by a variety of partners. The projects include construction of new buildings, modular units, full and limited refurbishments / repurposing of existing buildings, and public realm works. Many of the projects are at an early stage and they are committed to the government’s Net Zero Strategy - the Town Deal programme is funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and this forms part of their guidance.</p> <p>All projects have made a statement in their business cases as to how they intend to respond to the above agenda and this will be monitored</p>

by the Town Deal Programme Team on a regular reporting basis.

Examples of methodologies and ambitions adopted by some projects:

- Churchfield Business Centre – aiming to achieve BREEAM good to excellent standard (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method – which sets the standard for best practice in sustainable building design, construction and operation).
- The Public Realm and Green Connections project is expected to produce a Carbon Management Plan as part of its development and will be guided by the Net Zero Carbon Buildings Framework
- East Sussex College Group will be establishing a Green Technology Centre at the Ore Valley Campus Site – addressing some of the local & regional skilled labour needs to move towards a green economy
- A partnership between Education Futures Trust and Plumpton College which will result in the introduction of a green, environmental, and land-based curriculum delivered by Plumpton College at The Firs.

The reliance on meeting high sustainability standards falls on the project leads such as East Sussex County Council, East Sussex College Group, Hastings Commons, Hastings Borough Council and others.

The work with Homes England is at a very early stage but the sustainability agenda will be addressed when we are clearer about their interest in the regeneration of the town centre.

<p>Councillor Cooke</p>	<p>Following rejection of the proposed cycle route through the park in Dec 2022, can the portfolio holder please update the council on discussions with ESCC and whether there are any alternate solutions being considered?</p>	<p>Councillor Roark:</p> <p>Following Full Council’s rejection of the ESCC proposals for a shared cycle route through Alexandra Park, HBC officers wrote to ESCC seeking their views on the implications of the council’s decision. The County Council responded by stating:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Having allocated considerable resources to the current proposal through Alexandra Park, over a 10-year period, and with little confidence that alternative alignment options would be feasible, or locally acceptable, East Sussex County Council will not provide any further resource or funding to alternative alignment proposals at this time.</i></p> <p>As Lead Member for the Environment, I have also emailed to request a meeting with officers at ESCC to discuss this and will update if I receive a response to my request.</p>
<p>Councillor Carr</p>	<p>With proposed budget cuts to community safety and the scrapping of the budget for violence against women and girls, the license granted for a 24hour gambling establishment in the town centre, increasing issues with street drinkers and anti-social behaviour, traffic in the pedestrian zone and our extremely high crime rate, how does the portfolio holder plan to tackle these issues in the town centre and indeed anti-social behaviour in the town as a whole and when can the full council expect to see a presentation on how our statutory duties will be met in this area within these ever depleting budgets?</p>	<p>Councillor Rogers:</p> <p>The whole council is having to make cuts. Community safety budgets, although reduced will not drastically affect the day-to-delivery of the council’s community safety responsibilities.</p> <p>Indeed, the council’s community safety team has been integral in obtaining (with the PCC’s office) government monies from three of the four Safer Streets funding rounds, totalling over £840,000. The council’s Community Safety Manager and Support Officer co-ordinated and implemented many of the projects themselves. It is hoped that further Safer Street’s funding rounds will follow, allowing access to more funds to address local community safety priorities. Violence against women and girls along with tackling anti-social behaviour remain key priorities for the Joint Safer Hastings and Rother Community Safety Partnership, which is co-chaired by the portfolio holder.</p>

There is extensive partnership activity addressing the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda in the Borough, and pan-Sussex including: the [Safe Place App](#), support for increased police patrols, 'Bystander to Upstander' training, school awareness sessions, weekend taxi marshals, a Safe Space in His Place church Robertson Street as well as ongoing work with East Sussex County Council through [the Pan Sussex Domestic Abuse Strategic Framework](#) More is being progressed through the Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership. The Borough Council has also retained its White Ribbon accreditation (since 2014) and regular task and finish groups with local support groups and police, help to respond to VAWG concerns.

The street drinker issues have been a long-standing challenge in the Borough, hence the introduction and renewal of the Anti-Social Behaviour PSPO. Police and Warden enforcement is never the long-term solution.

With the recent investment from of Project ADDER, (now East Sussex Harm to Hope), the Rough Sleeping Initiative, greater awareness of Seaview and other voluntary organisation and greater support being made available for housing needs in the borough, considerable help is available to street drinkers.

The challenge remains in offering something that these members of our community can engage with, rather than continuing enforcing against their unacceptable behaviour.

The license granted for a 24hour gambling establishment in the town centre received no objections from anyone. Gambling as you know can be seriously addictive and, therefore we will be talking to ESCC Public Health about future gambling establishments in town with other portfolio holders.

A small working group, led by ESCC Highways, is working to change the unworkable bollards in Queens Road, Robertson Street and

Cambridge Road. It is proposed that gates or similar will limit access, in line with the existing traffic regulation order in the town centre. It is anticipated that ESCC Highways will be consulting, and hopefully installing these in the Spring of 2023. This control should help allay immediate pedestrian safety fears whilst the Town Deal's Public Reams & Green Connections plans develop proposals. The gates can then be used elsewhere.

Hastings' crime rate consists of several parts:

- Property crime – burglar numbers currently low, thefts from outbuildings and bicycle thefts are also low. Reports of shop lifting are also low. This is affected by retailers not reporting and 'writing off' store thefts. This is something that the PCC is keen to challenge.
- Violent crime - this is relatively high for Hastings but is not the highest in East Sussex (Eastbourne has higher rates). Hastings' violent crime has reduced by over 10% in recent months. Aside from the occasional drug related feud incident, Hastings remains a safe place to live, work and visit. And there is a range of initiatives, already mentioned, that are there to help.
- Drug enforcement – this is led by police and reliant on intelligence being provided for police to act. It is always helpful if anyone seeing drug dealing report it to [Sussex Police](#). This can then be tackled in a 'problem solving manner' with appropriate help.
- Domestic abuse – reports and the handling of domestic abuse is something we need to encourage. Domestic abuse makes up about 20% of reported crime and it continues to rise. More resources are being put into encouraging reporting, informing young people about healthy relationships and the PCC's office have been working with offenders to deal with domestic related violent anger issues both in and out of prison.

<p>Councillor Collins</p>	<p>Each spring there is a severe incursion of brown tailed moths affecting Swan Memorial Gardens, Warrior Square Gardens and other public spaces across the town. At present these areas are maintained by an outside contractor but maintenance will shortly be coming back in house. Please could the lead member for the environment say what plans are being considered to address the brown tailed moth problem from spring 2024?</p>	<p>Councillor Roark:</p> <p>Several sites around the town have for the last 4 to 5 years been seriously infested with the Brown Tail Moth/caterpillars. The Brown Tail Moth (BTM) can cause serious skin irritations and the hairs from the caterpillars can cause breathing problems, especially to young children and vulnerable adults. BTM are active between April to September.</p> <p>These particular infestations have caused some of our green spaces and small parks areas to be closed to the public for months on end and have meant that the grounds maintenance has had to stop undertaking work on the affected plantings at these sites.</p> <p>Swan Gardens and Warrior Square Rise garden in particular have suffered most because a lot of the site plantings provided the main food source and habitat for the Brown Tail Moth via 'the Rosacea' family.</p> <p>Our Parks team have already been proactive in addressing the infestations at each site across the town, working with our existing grounds contractor and other specialist services, this work has involved the removal of the main food sources for the Brown Tailed Moth, severe cutbacks of infested plantings and the removal from sites of the BTM tented nests at the appropriate seasonal time.</p> <p>This work to date has provided good results and will be continued throughout the remaining contract and into the new In house grounds service post November 2023.</p> <p>There is no guarantee that the actions programmed will fully eradicate the brown tail moths, though we will be able to measure whether this work has been a success as we move through the season. This work once completed and if successful will also allow us to reinstate the ground maintenance in the sites affected.</p>
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<p>Councillor Patmore</p>	<p>It is the Council's ambition to have an Asset Management Plan in place as soon as possible to determine the true income and expenditure of the Council's asset portfolio.</p> <p>Bearing this in mind, it has been noted on numerous occasions that Cabinet members have referred to the purchases of commercial property assets extolling the fact they generate an income for the Council.</p> <p>Without an Asset Management Plan in place, is it possible for any member to know whether any of our commercial assets are generating a net income?</p>	<p>Councillor Willis:</p> <p>The Asset Management Plan will enable us, along with improvements to the way we allocate and apportion costs, to have a better understanding of all of our assets not just the commercial ones. All the figures are published in totality as part of the financial monitoring returns, but we don't publish to individual level of assets as currently this is not possible in all cases so they are summarised into cost centres instead which are published as part of the financial monitoring reports.</p> <p>We do hold the level of income generated by our assets (where applicable) and this is monitored through the rents schedule held centrally in Finance to aid forecasting of budgets. We cannot disclose specific details as this would be exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).</p>
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