

Council – 22 April 2021

Item 8 - Public Questions supplement

3 - Question from Mr P. Hollingworth

I understand that KGE Ltd submits its accounts to Companies House and they can be viewed online here [KNOWLE GREEN ESTATES LIMITED - Filing history \(free information from Companies House\)](#).

Furthermore, I understand from KGE's website that, "Because KGE is a 'controlled company' of the Council, its activities and decision making are open to inspection and scrutiny by the Council's auditors, councillors and the public. In addition, the company is regularly reviewed by Cabinet, Audit Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and its accounts are separately audited."

Therefore, please can the Council:

- a) provide an example of the financial reporting which is provided by Knowle Green Estates to the Council for performance monitoring purposes, state how often is it provided and where is it shown in Council reports?
- b) state how many full-time-equivalent employees KGE Ltd currently has and confirm if they are considered to be in the Council headcount?
- c) state, having now been established for nearly 5 years, what the latest key performance indicators are showing us for KGE Ltd and whether the full Council is happy with the value for money to date (in particular the £113k showing for the 'management charge' in the 2019 accounts)?
- d) can you outline why SBC still needs Knowle Green Estates and what purpose it serves?

4 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

The balance of the Project Delivery Fund (£497k) was identified in the Q3 Revenue Monitoring Report as being available for "consideration for release for other projects". I have asked several councillors in the administration whether these funds specifically could be repurposed for Green Initiatives but have received no reply. Now that we have reached year-end, please can the Council confirm if the provision was identified as "savings" and released or whether it has been used/put aside for some other purpose?

5 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Given Cllr Boughtflower's acknowledgement at the February 2021 Council Meeting that the government's Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) figure of 606 dwellings per annum for Spelthorne can be considered a "starting point", what further work has been done to date by the Local Plan Task Group on

ways to reduce the local housing need figures to sustainable targets to take account of the large proportion of the borough designated as Green Belt or otherwise covered by LOCAL "absolute constraints" (e.g. water, functional floodplain etc)? By further work, I mean over and above the two approaches to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) asking them to change the government's standard methodology.

6 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Given this Council's stated commitment to flood risk prevention and mitigation, what is the possible justification for excluding some building footprints in the highest risk area (Flood Zone 3b) from the definition of Functional Floodplain as proposed in Local Plan Policy E2 (Flooding), and exactly which building footprints (of what size) in Flood Zone 3b does the Council have in mind?

7 – Question from Mr A. Woodward

Please see below the text of a question that I would like addressed to the Councillor Noble at the forthcoming meeting on Thursday 22nd April.

I am grateful to Cllr Noble's answer to my question at the last Council meeting in which he stated that all departments across the Council are now aware of the need to take account of the climate emergency in their planning. Does the Council have a programme of staff training to ensure that all Council staff understand the nature of the climate emergency and are equipped to understand how they need to adapt their planning in response to this emergency?

8 – Question from Ms S. Woodward

I would like to ask the following question of Councillor Noble at the Council meeting on 22nd April 202.

In the Spring Bulletin, I was delighted to read that Spelthorne Council believes, ' there needs to be a greater step change to reduce carbon emissions and damage to the environment for our residents and future generations'. It was therefore with great shock and dismay that I found that an area in Lammas Park, adjacent to the refreshment kiosk, and consisting of raised beds supporting beautiful, mature, carbon capturing shrubs, plants and soil had been destroyed.

These habitats for birds, pollinators, small mammals, annelids and invertebrates have been replaced by barren, impermeable tarmac!

Can the council explain how this can happen without consultation with local residents and how such desecration fits in with the council's published intent to, 'review everything we control and manage as your council and ensure we can carry out our work with the least impact on the environment' ?

9 – Question from Mr A. Peters

I would be grateful if you could arrange for the following questions to be asked of The Council Leader at the April full council meeting regarding the serious concerns raised in the report by the developments and investments review group.

The report by the working group reviewing the Council's developments and investments stated that the group believed there is a lack of public involvement in the Council's ambitious development programme highlighting in particular the Benwell House development. In this case the report states "Public consultation only took place on the final design for a 5-storey block in Phase 2 with no alternatives offered". This lack of local involvement has resulted in a Phase 2 proposal which is widely resisted locally and has led to over 225 planning objection letters. Can the leader please outline what processes will be put in place to ensure such shameful lack of public consultation does not occur ever again, and will he commit to a proper and meaningful consultation on Phase 2 of Benwell House.

10 – Question from Mr A. Peters

The report by the working group reviewing the Council's developments and investments stated that:

- council officials were reluctant to engage in the review process,
- that intervention of the Council Leader was required for officers to engage even partially in the review,
- that even now officers have been reluctant to identify who made the decisions regarding the ballooning scope and costs of the developments and have still not provided full DIG reports

Despite the leadership changing and an apparent political will to review the current opaque practices around the development programme it appears there is huge organisational inertia to any change of direction, not least from senior council officials and the many contractors employed to push these schemes through. Can the leader please describe what steps have been taken to ensure that senior council officials are on-board with the recommendations of the working group report and give the public confidence that we will see evidence of a marked improvement in their performance and transparency.

11 – Question from Mr A. Peters

The working group raised serious concerns about the long-term resource requirements and skills necessary for the development and management of the portfolio. Given that the entire budget for Benwell House has already been spent on Phase 1 these concerns appear well founded. Can the leader please describe what steps have been taken to fill the resourcing and skills gaps identified in the report.

12 – Question from Mr C. Hyde

As a Spelthorne resident, I would like to ask the following question at the Council meeting on 22 April 2021.

Question addressed to Cllr Boughtflower or Cllr Noble:

"In response to a question, Cllr Noble stated during the Council meeting of 25th February 2021 that there were "large contingencies for the Climate emergency". How much in actual figures are the contingencies that were referred to and that have been put aside by this Council for the Climate Emergency?".

13 – Question from Ms S. Molloy

In the recent Council spring bulletin, Cllr Noble called on everyone to take "personal responsibility and adopt.. a more selfless attitude" to protect the planet, plant life and species. How does he consider that his own planning application (20/01544/FUL) to develop his **own** Green Belt site is compatible with his call on others to change **their** ways and does he consider that the duty to protect the environment and green belt only applies to others?

14 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Where can interested parties find the Water Cycle Study which the Environment Agency has twice recommended be carried out as part of the Local Plan Evidence Base and, if not yet complete, when will this be available please [View Comment - Spelthorne Local Plan - Preferred Options Consultation: Policies and Site Allocations - Spelthorne](#)?

15 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Does the Local Plan Task Group plan to incorporate the Sustainable Design principles advocated by Rachel Rae from the Environment Agency's Sustainable Places team in their Preferred Options consultation submission from 21st January 2020 [View Comment - Spelthorne Local Plan - Preferred Options Consultation: Policies and Site Allocations - Spelthorne](#)?

16 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Does the Local Plan Task Group plan to incorporate the Green & Blue Infrastructure recommendations advocated by Rachel Rae from the Environment Agency in her Preferred Options consultation submission [View Comment - Spelthorne Local Plan - Preferred Options Consultation: Policies and Site Allocations - Spelthorne](#)?

17 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Does the Local Plan Task Group plan to incorporate the Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS) advocated by Rachel Rae from the Environment Agency in her Preferred Options consultation submission [View Comment - Spelthorne Local Plan - Preferred Options Consultation: Policies and Site Allocations - Spelthorne](#)

18 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

Please can you tell interested parties when the Authority Monitoring Report for 2019/20 will be published as it doesn't appear to be on the website yet? [Authority Monitoring Report - Spelthorne Borough Council](#)

19 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

I understand that certain numbers in the budget are required for statutory reporting and I can see that the budgeted **Council Tax for the Year of £8,000,300 (Figure C) in accordance with Section 31 to 36 of the Local Government Act 1992** equals the bottom line of the Council Tax calculation in Appendix 4 (i.e. "**Net sum to be recovered through Council Tax**"). However, please could officers clarify how two of the other headline numbers from the Local Council Tax 2021/22 Budget (**namely A = £104,340,381 and B = £96,340,081**) reconcile back to the Council Tax calculation in Appendix 4 of the Revenue Budget presented in February 2021 as this is not clear and I cannot see these two numbers in any other report (and my email enquiry has not been answered)?

NB Appendix 1 has similar numbers for the "Charge to Collection Fund" of £103,992,781 and £95,992,480 (with a net figure of £8,000,300) but these are obviously both out by a difference of £347,600.

20 – Question from Mrs K. Sanders

I understand the pandemic has caused major changes in the finances of every organisation. However, please could interested parties get more explanation of the major variances in the financial reporting going forward? Specifically for now, for example, why is the budgeted Pensions allowance of **£205,000 for 2021/22 only 20% of the allowance made in 2020/21 when it was £1,058,000?** That is, in itself, a difference of £853,000 which was not fully explained in the report or the meeting.

NB The Revenue Budget report does talk in section 3.3.2 about a reduction in the secondary pension rate from £2.122m in 2020/21 to £1m in 2021/22 but these numbers cannot be seen in the detailed Revenue Budget in Appendix 1 (and they don't marry up with the numbers quoted for Pensions in that report).