

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 22nd February 2018

Question 1 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services

What are the reason why the recycling targets are not being met at 54% (currently 47%) each month and why are they being rebalanced?

Answer

Mr Webb asked a very similar question to this at Full Council on 14th December 2017 and I would remind him to the answer provided at that briefing.

There have been some differences between the Council and Veolia in respect of waste data produced, and the Council is using the contract mechanism to enable these differences to be resolved.

This has now been completed and agreement reached with Veolia and as a result, revised targets can be set for 2018/19.

Question 2 from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council

How much have the Southend Conservative Borrowed in 2016 – 2017, 2017 – 2018 and what is the money used for and how long will it take to repay the loans?

Answer

The Council has not undertaken any external borrowing from the public works loan board in either 2016/17 or 2017/18 but has undertaken a small amount of borrowing for the replacement street lighting programme of £4.6m and £0.9m respectively in those years. This borrowing is repayable over the next 22 years but does not impact on the Councils revenue budget as the financing costs are covered by the reduction in energy and maintenance costs of the new street lighting over those years.

Question 3 from Mr Philip Miller to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services

Question

In recent times the Council's mantra has been, 'car parking income is unpredictable.' I believe this was in order to defend paying Turnstone a management fee to take the seaway car park off the Council's hands.

On the contrary in only one year of the last 10 years has car parking income fallen, the fact is there has been a 67% increase over that same period. Based on current news, restaurants and retailing are both having difficult times (Jamie Oliver's, The Restaurant Group, Marks and Spencers to name a few).

The Seaway development is likely to have a corresponding impact on our high street! In fact over sixty percent of BID members are against the scheme. If predictably is what the Council wants, they should be doing everything they can to take advantage of the 14% growth in visitors taking staycations and increase parking in order to get more income and grow tourism.

Where are the much promised tourism and parking strategy reports that shows this administration have a grip?

Answer

The Tourism Strategy was presented at the Southend Tourism Partnership in Spring last year in draft form. We received contributions to its final approved version from the business community, including comments from Stockvale and it was approved at Full Council in July 2017.

The Council has commissioned an Access and Parking Strategy which is being undertaken by Steer Davis Gleave who prepared the Parking Strategy which was part of the evidence base for the SCAAP. The Access and Parking Strategy will consider the wider issues of transport and travel into and within the Borough as a whole and this work is currently on-going. This Strategy will also look at how best to enable visitors and residents to move around the Borough which includes issues such as signage and signposting, advance information, improved information on car parking availability and the use of SMART technology. Part of this work will include engagement with stakeholders and residents of the Borough. It is anticipated that this phase of strategy will take place in the next 3 or 4 months.

Question 4 from Mr Marc Miller to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

Question

The planning inspector's 'Examination of the Southend Central Area Action Plan' report dated 12th December 2017 contains various figures (data) which appears to have little veracity. Para 65- Re employment and tourism figures appear to be historic and is certainly not our experience running a business in Southend for over 40 years. When the Council applies the 'no net loss' policy to parking provision within 10 minutes walk of the seafront (as arising from Policy DS.5 with the main modifications), can it confirm that its assessment of parking going forward in the area will specifically recognise/take into account that Adventure Island is busy during most evenings of school holidays and Saturdays, nights during fireworks etc, and that will directly conflict with the peak activity at the proposed Cinema and leisure development at Seaway?

Answer

The Inspector has considered all evidence and representations during examination of the SCAAP.

Paragraph 96 of the Inspectors Report refers to representations made during the Hearing sessions (as referenced in paragraph 11 of examination document EXSCAAP027 Rep 588-5 Hearing Statement – Matter 8 – RPS for Stockvale) that a proposed cinema use on the Seaway site would be primarily aimed at local residents, rather than day trippers.

The Inspector, in paragraph 95, comments that if this is the case, and given that most cinema use occurs in the evening, 'it is not unreasonable to assume that to an extent the two main demands on the car parking would be complementary rather than overlapping.' The Inspector goes on to conclude, in paragraph 97 of his Report, that '...the facilities proposed would be either supportive of or at least complementary to tourism...and finally, policy DS5 as modified would ensure that there would be no net loss in public car parking within 10 minutes' walk to the seafront'.

Any planning application for development of a Key Visitor Car Park will have to be supported by a transport assessment.

Question 5 from Mr Marc Miller to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

Question

The planning Inspector identified in the SCAAP that there was recognition that many tourists come to Southend by private car, and it was identified that a key issue was the inadequacy of car parking south of the railway; loss of spaces at Seaway and Tyler's and other issues. Can you tell me what measures the Council will introduce within the SCAAP to ensure that adequate provision is made for road-based transport (e.g. access and parking), and how will this be translated into specific actions going forward, noting that preferred tourist car parks at Seaway and Tylers are proposed for significant redevelopment? In particular, the Council noted that there was an increase in tourism from 2011-2015; as car parking is critical to access by tourists, what additional measures will be provided to enhance car parking to accommodate this, and further future growth, in addition to potential park and ride facilities?

Answer

The Inspector who examined the Plan, concludes that the Southend Central Area Action Plan (SCAAP) provides a sustainable framework for the development of the local economy. The SCAAP policies for transport, access and parking provides for all users, and are consistent with national policy and positively prepared so as to enable the retention and growth of all sectors of the economy. They are set out in Section 4.11 and Policy DS5 of the SCAAP.

In paragraph 57 of the Report of the Examination of the SCAAP, the Inspector agrees that the SCAAP has secured an acceptable balance between providing for the car and promoting sustainable travel.

In paragraph 62 the Inspector notes “maintaining a significant number of public parking spaces that would be unused for most of the year would not in my view represent the optimum use of these sites or be sustainable. The Plan pursues the strategy of managing the existing parking network in order to optimise its use, which is a sustainable and realistic course to take.”

The Council has commissioned an Access and Parking Strategy to consider the wider issues of transport and travel into and within the Borough as a whole and this work is currently on-going. Part of this work will include engagement with stakeholders and residents of the Borough.

Question 6 from Mr Thwaites to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Services

Question

The Rossi site forms part of the boundary of CS1.2 redevelopment site in the SCAAP. It is my understanding that this site was purchased by the Council to facilitate the development of the Seaway car park site.

I would like to know if this site forms part of the development agreement with Turnstone Southend Limited, and would the recent demolition of the Rossi building be considered to be enabling works for the Turnstone development?

Answer

The Rossi site was acquired by the Council using EEDA grant. The site was acquired to improve the Seaway development opportunity. The site forms part of the land under the Turnstone agreement. The principal reason for the demolition was to mitigate ongoing costs and the risks associated with a large, vacant building in a vulnerable location.

It was intended that Turnstone would deal with the demolition but instead, the Council has done this to manage its liabilities and Turnstone has agreed to pay the full demolition cost.

Question 7 from Mr Ali to the Executive Councillor for Health and Adult Social Care

Question

What action is Southend Borough Council taking and/or proposes to take in the future to ensure that Healthwatch Southend is meeting its statutory duties?

Answer

Healthwatch are commissioned, via Family Action, by Southend Borough Council to provide a range of services, these include; gathering the views of the public and influencing services.

Since being commissioned to provide Healthwatch services Family Action have taken a proactive role ensuring that they act as a champion for consumers and users of health and social care services.

They are currently based in Centre Place children's centre enabling them to regularly support drop in sessions at the Hub and other children's centres across Southend.

To procure the services and in accordance with Corporate Procurement Regulations a competitive tender process was undertaken resulting in Family Action being appointed. The contract duration is for an initial 2 years with options to extend. Officers regularly meet with the service provider to review contract and agreed key performance indicators. Under the terms of the contract the service provider is meeting the agreed service levels.

One of the key functions for healthwatch is to represent residents during the STP public consultation. We are aware of a number of opportunities for this to take place but always very keen to understand how other healthwatch areas are approaching this.

Question 8 from Mr Kearney to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services

Question

The planning inspector accepted totally and unequivocally that there should be 'no net loss' of parking spaces in the southern part of the Central Area. He requires the Council to make a modification (para 67-MM9) in the SCAAP to ensure this critical point is enshrined in policy and sets a precedent for any subsequent planning applications.

Given that with the adoption of the SCAAP, the Council will make it a specific policy to encourage the complete redevelopment of key seafront-focused car parks:

Can the Council tell us with certainty exactly where the replacement spaces will be located when development come forward on Seaway and Tyler car parks and will the Council be obliging itself (financially and otherwise) to provide these car parks in facilitating development at Seaway?

Answer

The Inspector endorsed the car parking figures put forward by the Council, as set out in new table 5, which are based on the Car Parking Study for the Central Area of Southend. (Para. 69 – Inspectors Report).

The SCAAP does not make it a specific policy to encourage the complete redevelopment of all key visitor car parks. The SCAAP policy

DS5 provides that there will be no net loss of car parking spaces on the key visitor car parks in Central Area South.

When sites come forward for development, they will be considered on their individual planning merits, taking into account the development plan and all relevant material planning considerations.

Question 9 from Mr Kearney to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

The Officer's report states that the proposed modifications to the SCAAP have to be either accepted in full or rejected, and sets out the consequences of rejecting the proposed modifications. There is no indication within the Officer's Report that Councillors could make minor amendments to address updated information or minor corrections to the SCAAP.

Can the Executive Councillor explain to the public and Councillors what they are able to do here – e.g. must they only adopt the plan as it is now propose or can they make minor modifications. If so, what are the consequences, or would the changes result in the entire plan being sent back to the drawing board?

Answer

The Inspector has considered all evidence and representations during examination of the SCAAP, including those relating to parking numbers.

The Inspectors Report concludes that the SCAAP is legally compliant and is sound if it is adopted with main modifications. These modifications are included as an Appendix to the Inspectors Report and are proposed in the adoption version of the SCAAP. The main modifications all relate to matters that were discussed at the Examination Hearings and broadly reflect those proposed by the Council following the hearing sessions.

Minor modifications were also proposed to the SCAAP, these relate to typing errors and points of clarification. Anything more significant would likely to amount to more than a minor modification and would require the Council to undertake a review of the Plan and may result in a fresh set of consultations. Depending on the nature of the modifications, this could effectively amount to a revision of the Plan.

The SCAAP has been through the full statutory process and examined by an Independent Planning Inspector, including representations and evidence submitted by interested parties.

The Inspector has concluded that with the recommended main modifications the SCAAP met the requirements of the 2004 Planning Act and meets the criteria for soundness in the National Planning Policy Framework. There is no need to make any further modifications minor or otherwise which is why the Plan is submitted to Full Council for adoption, having gone through the appropriate scrutiny by the approved Inspector.

Question 10 from Mr Kelleway to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

Question

In the Planning Inspector's report of the 'Examination of the SCAAP' dated 12th December 2017 (Para 58) – It notes the proposed park and ride scheme at Leigh Railway station. From the responses received during the consultations regarding this proposal, did the Leigh Traders express concerns regarding possible impacts on their business and overall, did they express their support for this or were they against this?

Answer

The Southend Central Area Action Plan (SCAAP) was subject to extensive consultation during its preparation. The SCAAP contains a number of provisions to guide and manage development and makes reference to explore park and ride opportunities. Any further consultation on a scheme will be considered at the implementation stage.

The proposal to use Leigh Railway Station was a matter that was raised during the examination in public by parties attending the Hearing, which is why the Inspector refers to it in his report. Leigh Town Council and Leigh Traders Association were consulted on the SCAAP, but made no representations in respect of a park and ride.

Question 11 from Mr Kelleway to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

Question

The planning inspector concluded that overall the SCAAP was unsound and has stipulated 22 modifications required to make it sound. He accepted entirely a critical point for businesses on the seafront and high street that developments have to, in his words 'consume their own smoke' (Para 71), of the report. This appears to mean, any developer proposing to redevelop the Seaway car park must ensure the proposed development meets its own needs, as well as ensuring there is no net loss of existing parking.

How will the Council ensure that the proposed development at Seaway Car Park incorporates both enough spaces for the development and maintain the spaces currently provided at Seaway for other users, particularly tourists or is the Council facilitating a further relocation of some spaces away from the car park to enable development to come forward, and if so has the Council identified the proposed site for relocation?

Answer

As part of the evidence base submitted to the Examination in Public to support the SCAAP's policy provisions, car parking data was submitted as part of the Car Parking Study for the Central Area of Southend. This included car parking surveys undertaken in May 2016. This data was accepted by the Inspector as reflected in Table 5 of the SCAAP (as proposed by main modification 8) which identifies 478 spaces at Seaway Car Park.

The Agreement with Turnstone to develop Seaway car park provides for a minimum of 480 spaces in the new development.

Question 12 from Mr Cross to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adults Social Care

Question

The NHS is facing £22 billion in cuts by 2020 and the Council cuts from Central Government are likely to amount to a further £1.5 billion.

In light of this are all Councillors aware of just which NHS Services they will be agreeing to take on if they support the PCBC? Does the Council know what funding will follow these services and for what period this will continue before being cut and would the Council be happy taking decisions on which, if not all services to the most vulnerable people in our community they will be forced to abandon due to these cuts?

Answer

The STP proposals are currently out for public consultation. The process and detail of the proposals are clearly articulated in the STP published documentation.

Southend Borough Council is currently debating a response to the STP proposals which revolves around the impact on transport, workforce, stroke services, investment in Localities and capital investment for Southend Hospital. In addition, Southend Borough Council is contributing to a number of other responses to the STP public consultation through engagement with Health and Wellbeing Board and a recently convened Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee.

There is no specific plan within the pre-consultation business case to move NHS commissioned services to Local Authority responsibility. This is not part of the current proposals out for public consultation.

As a council we do have concerns regarding the STP proposals which are the subject of debate at this evening's full council.

Question 13 from Mrs Fletcher to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability

Question

As a consequence of the recent planning application to carry out preliminary ground investigations and associated works approved by Maldon District Council, the prospect of a new nuclear power station at Bradwell is becoming more of a reality.

What involvement has Southend Borough Council had in the discussions regarding this development?

Answer

We have not had any engagement on this matter as a Local Planning Authority at the present time.

Question 14 from Mrs Fletcher to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Service

Question

Given that the exclusion zone extended 18 miles away from Chernobyl and that the centre of Southend is approximately 15 miles from Bradwell – what provisions does Southend Council plan to put in place to evacuate residents in the case of a nuclear disaster at the site?

Answer

In March 2002 the Magnox Nuclear Power Station at Bradwell ceased generation and decommissioning began. All spent nuclear fuel was removed from the site by 2005; the turbine hall was demolished in 2011; and by 2016 underground waste storage vaults had been emptied and decontaminated. There is therefore no current risk of a nuclear incident occurring at this site and in any event, the reactor design was intrinsically safer, and the safety feature would never have been disabled, as they were at Chernobyl.

In September 2015, the Energy Secretary announced that China was expected to lead the construction of a Beijing-designed nuclear station at the Bradwell. In January 2017, the UK Office for Nuclear Regulation started their Design Assessment process of the reactor design which is expected to be completed in 2021, in advance of possible future deployment at Bradwell.

Southend on Sea Borough Council is a member of the Essex Resilience Forum which is a multi-agency partnership which prepares for emergencies in Essex. The Council also has its own emergency planning function and a Major Incident Plan that would be activated in the event that a major incident was declared that affected the Town.

Question 15 from Mr Thompson to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Services

Question

Savills were employed by the Council and involved in negotiating the terms of the Seaway development with Turnstone Estates. Savills were then asked to give a certificate of best value on these terms that they had negotiated themselves. Council officers at the time were also fully aware that the MD of Turnstone, Tim Deacon, had been previously employed for years by Savills and ran their commercial development team. It is plain for all to see that a grave error of judgement has been made, in that the Council should have used a different surveyor. In any other professional organisation this would be unacceptable.

Does the leadership of the current administration have a grip on its officers?

Answer

Savills were appointed in July 2013 following a mini-tender because they best grasped the brief, demonstrated they had the skills to act for the Council and proposed a fair and appropriate fee to do so.

Savills is a global real estate services provider with an international network of more than 600 offices and associates, employing more than 27,000 staff. In the UK, Savills is one of the largest multi-disciplinary property firms, offering the full spectrum of specialist advisory, management and transactional services across the core Commercial, Residential and Rural sectors to private and institutional clients seeking to acquire, lease, develop or realise the value of prime residential and commercial property from 95 offices.

Mr Deacon ran the Cambridge Development Team at Savills until April 2011, when he joined Turnstone. This is 2 years before the Council engaged Savills.

Question 16 from Mr Thompson to the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Community Services

Question

Under the seaway development heads of terms the Council will receive the paltry rental sum of £282k per annum. This annual revenue will not increase until the rents paid by the development's tenants exceed £2.56 million per annum. I believe this will never happen and the Council's income will be stuck at £282k. annum and show how this forecast has been evidenced?

Please could you state in which year of the deal you forecast the tennant's rent to exceed £2.56mn per annum and show how this forecast has been evidenced?

Answer

The Seaway lease agreement secures a high rent gearing and it is this arrangement in particular that Savills and the further independent firm (when appointed) are required to scrutinise in their assessment of whether the property deal offers best value.

Aside from the property deal, the Council will have no further liability to pay business rates on the site, but will receive a much higher level of rates across the development. The BID Levy will also be received and it is expected that the development will encourage and hold more residents and visitors to this part of the town which will in turn support the local economy through higher levels of spending and an improved offering for residents and visitors alike. The improved offering will also be all year round and in all weathers and it is estimated that the development will support in the region of 450 new jobs and add hotel rooms to the central seafront area to further encourage longer stays. There will also be a significant number of jobs generated during construction.

The Council is satisfied that the scheme overall delivers a better financial position for the Council and significant wider economic benefits whilst maintaining a high level of car parking on-site.

Question 17 from Mr Fieldhouse to the Executive Councillor for Health and Adult Social Care

Question

Two key systematic research papers reviewing over 300 other scientific papers; Halm, et al. (2002) & Chowdhury (2007), that are heavily relied upon by the STP for evidence to support their proposals for the creation of 'Specialist Centres' at selected hospitals, both derive their data mainly from research carried out in the 1980s & 1990s, though some is cited as far back as 1957.

When I presented Prof Jon Nicholl's extensive 2007 research paper on distance travelled by emergency ambulances and increased mortality rates to the relevant portfolio holder last year, in relationship to the proposed downgrading of Southend A&E dept, she suggested that the data was 'out-dated' having been collected between 1997 and 2001. What are your thoughts on the relevance of the two papers used by the STP to underpin its proposals for root and branch reconfiguration of local hospital services?

Answer

Thank you for your question about the relevance of the research used in the development of the Mid and South Essex STP plans.

The paper by Professor Nicholls and colleagues, which you highlighted last year, focuses on journey distance and patient mortality. The authors themselves highlighted the limitations of the study as it looked at outcomes from an emergency care system operating in 1997 to 2001. They also acknowledged that there have been further changes over the last decade to the way in which people who are transported to hospital as an emergency are managed.

The other two papers which you have highlighted are looking at the impact of bringing specialist services together in one place. In particular they are examining the impact of the volume of cases being treated and improvement in patient outcomes. Both of these papers are high quality systematic reviews which analyse the results of multiple scientific studies to provide a high level of evidence on the effectiveness of healthcare interventions. The clinical evidence review upon which the decision-making was based for specialist services in the STP actually includes 17 research papers, many of which include more recent data up to 2016.

This review highlights the overall benefits of treatment by specialist centres for patient outcomes over that of more general teams.

Question 18 from Mr Dawson to the Executive Councillor of Transport, Waste and Regulatory Services

Question

What are the future plans for residents parking for those of us unable to currently get parking permits at residents rates? As a council tax payer surely we should be treated the same regardless of location of our properties. With more and more residential developments being built in and free spaces becoming further and further away from the town centre how are we meant to park near our properties without incurring the high cost of parking charges which is not financially viable to continue with?

Answer

The town centre is a controlled parking zone subject to parking charges and these charges ensure a turnover of parking is maintained by discouraging long term parking. The area needs to accommodate parking for numerous activities including parking for the local shopping and tourist facilities and this parking availability is vital to ensure local businesses can thrive. There is however, recognition that residents also need to park.

Any residents living within the area are able to park in the pay and display parking bays at a significantly reduced charge by purchasing the annual season ticket. The resident's season tickets available in this area at a cost of £50.00 for 1 years parking (14p per day), represents free parking equivalent of almost £5,000 calculated using the daily charge (£14.20 daily) and is equivalent to a rebate of over three times the annual Council Tax of a band D property.

The pay and display parking restrictions have been in operation for over 20 years and residents are aware of the parking situation when moving into the area.