

# **Council**

**Thursday, 22 February 2018**

**Public Question Time and Councillors Question Time**

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**Public Questions  
Council  
22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018**

**Mr Les White has asked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety:**

- 1) I have been in touch with Housing about cars parking on grass area's not kerb, under the contract with the council it states no parking on grass area's but it happens and you end up with a churned up mud bath, but they keep saying there is nothing they can do my question is why? They say that private residents also do it my reply is that they should invoke there contract with the council and also taken this up with the councilor responsible for housing.

Why has the council not taken out a traffic order to bring a stop to this it would then bring in line council tenant and private resident, this could be in place in an area see how good it goes then pass it out further a bit at a time, you would need notices put up no parking on grass areas, this could save money in the long term by not having to repair these areas , has this council ever done this if not why not .Stevenage council has one fined £70 for doing this.

Grass verges are also a big problem but in some cases if people did not park on the verge due to the narrow roads emergency vehicles would not get through, so I suggest in this case the council allows the resident to put down grid panels at the residents expense, I see the price being £14-95 a metre or a roll at £99 per 10m roll from ground protection UK

Yes the council would need to approve products but it would be no cost to the council, or if they could come up with an offer which is acceptable to the resident they could do the work all work would need to be under their standards..

Some council allow you to put in a dropped kerb at your expense so why not allow residents to protect the verges, and keep the area looking nice not a mud bath?

**The Cabinet Member has responded:**

Thank you for your question.

1. I know that the Council's Housing team is aware of your complaint and officers have responded to you from a landlord perspective. The tenancy agreement only covers the accommodation and garden. Parking on this type of amenity land does present a difficulty with regard to enforcement as this can only be through the introduction of specific bye laws. I understand that other authorities have looked at this, the costs and complexities associated with enforcement do not justify its introduction amongst other local priorities.

I agree that there are ways residents can help by being more considerate as to where they park and council officers will always encourage this as a preferred course of action. In addition, we encourage householders to apply for a dropped

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kerb to enable to park within their own curtilage. The Council has, where resources permit, delivered solutions such as grasscrete. However, we assess each case on its own merits and subject to the resources available.

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**Ms Sarah Church has asked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety**

- 2) The Housing Revenue Account shows a total for voids and bad debts that is set to increase by over £2m between financial years 17/18 and 18/19 (as shown in the Overview of the HRA Revenue Budget). A recent Freedom of Information request to Swindon Borough Council by the Swindon Tenants' Campaign Group showed that much of this bad debt has been incurred through rent arrears as council tenants are required to make an application for Universal Credit when they have been in receipt of Housing Benefit: on December 3rd 2017, 829 of the 1080 council tenants who were on Universal Credit were in arrears (77% compared to 25% of all council tenants in arrears), equalling a rise in arrears to the Housing Revenue Account to a total of £1.308m.

What impact on council house repairs and upkeep will this shortfall in the Housing Revenue Account have for Swindon's council tenants in the forthcoming financial year, and what impact going forward, given that around 3000 further council tenants will have to move onto Universal Credit in the future?

**The Cabinet Member has responded:**

Thank you for your question.

2. There will be no impact on responsive repairs, allowances have been made for this in the Housing Revenue Budget for 2018/19. The capital repairs programme has also been protected as set out in the accompanying report to Full Council with £15.5 million set aside and this is consistent with the current financial year.

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**Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:**

- 3) "I would like to know how the council can justify proposals to spend over £5m on the planned Art Gallery by the Wyvern and increase council tax that both the Labour and Conservative administration have been complicit in despite fierce opposition from Swindon residents to the project?"

**The Leader of the Council has responded:**

Thank you for your question and I am delighted that this Council voted unanimously to support the bid by the independent Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Trust to the HLF, which echoes the far wider public endorsement that the Trust has received.

- 3 The case for the new museum and art gallery is overwhelming. In short, a new Museum and Art Gallery will support the Swindon's continued economic growth and success; opposing it risks putting the town into a spiral of decline.
- a. I am not aware of a single successful, healthy major town or city in the world that does not invest in its arts and culture. Having a modern facility will help raise the quality of life for those who live and work in Swindon. As well as homes and schools, one factor that employers tell me time and time again that the town needs for them to attract good staff is a healthy cultural and leisure offer. Sadly, through its size and location, the current building is no longer fit for purpose to do that. Having both more numerous and successful local companies will generate wealth and provide the tax income for public services. The proposed location in the town centre will also provide additional footfall to support local shops, which will again help support wealth creation. Lastly, having an attractive, modern facility will support the development of new high-quality flats such as the proposed new homes on the old tented market and Aspen House sites.
  - b. A new facility will provide value for money for the people of Swindon. At the moment many of the artefacts and paintings owned or donated to the Borough are kept in storage or are loaned to other galleries. Selling them off would net a small one-off return to the Council and lose our museum its accreditation and access to other resources. The new museum and art gallery will provide more access to Swindon's treasures.
  - c. One of the key parts of the bid to the HLF is that the new museum and art gallery will provide support to our schools by giving children and young people an opportunity to see, learn from, and develop their creative skills. As such, it will complement our local academies, colleges, and schools.

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**Mr Terrence Reynolds has asked the Leader of the Council:**

The Budget for this years Council tax is to rise yet again, against a backdrop of the lack of gov support and withdrawal of payments from the Gov.

Can the following please be explained, with that rise in mind:

- 4) Over a million pounds, paid to re-roof the MI, a building which the council doesn't even own.
- 5) A cost of nearly 7 million, to refurbish the carriage works in Sheppard St, again a building which the council doesn't own.
- 6) A promised 5 million to help fund the new museum, and even then there is still a short fall of 10 million, also what will the requirement be for ongoing support each year?
- 7) This week, we are now told, the council has started work to clean up the area around the old Corn Exchange, and yes once again a building\land, which again the council doesn't own.
- 8) We, also have now the ongoing fiasco about Lydiard House, and who is paying for the ongoing repairs etc.
- 9) Can we, as tax payers, be told, who is running the financial department of the council and how?? !!

**The Leader has responded:**

Thank you for your questions.

We should all remember the calamitous state in which the public finances were in 2010 – with the outgoing Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury openly admitting that there was no money left – and acknowledge that the governments since then have been striving to restore fiscal responsibility to the nation's public finance.

4. The only work undertaken on the Mechanics was that required by statute to prevent the building becoming a health hazard to the public.
5. By investing in the Carriage Works, the purchase of which the Council is negotiating, the Council has successfully secured a higher education facility for the town centre, is support of Vision Pledge 19. It has also provided better and more sustainable use that will preserve and extend the life of one of Swindon's historic buildings. It has also provided more space for the vibrant new start-up companies and small enterprises that are the life-blood of the local and national economy.
6. We already have a budget to support the current Museum and Art Gallery in Old Town and that money would be reallocated to the new facility if it is built. There will be other income opportunities from the building itself and, by supporting the regeneration of the Town Centre, the new Museum and Art gallery would increase the Council's income from business rates and Council Tax.
7. We are cleaning the area to support the redevelopment of the Corn Exchange site, which will preserve yet another of Swindon's historic buildings, and assist in the redevelopment of the area; however, the cost will be recovered from the

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developer. I make no apology for using limited amounts of public money to stimulate and support greater private sector investment.

8. Lydiard House and Park are safe and the Administration has provided a budget to cover running and maintenance costs.
9. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation is Councillor Russell Holland. Under his direction, finance officers have ensured that
  - i) Swindon has one of the lowest average band D council taxes of any English unitary authority – lower than Bristol or Reading.
  - ii) After 14 years of a Conservative administration the Council Tax has still risen less than it did in only 36 months of Labour-led budgets.
  - iii) Even when demand for adults' and children's care threatened to cause a £2.4m overspend last September, we have managed the Council's finances almost back into complete balance.
  - iv) Even with the rising demand for personalised care services caused by a growing population, the basic Council Tax increase proposed is still just under the rate of inflation, and, on top of that, we are proposing just 2% Adult Social Care precept.





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**Councillors' Questions  
(Standing Order 15)  
Full Council  
22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018**

**Councillor Abdul Amin has asked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety:**

- 1) Having completed the Sussex Place Redevelopment almost a year ago there seems to a number of houses still remains unoccupied, Can the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety please let me know the reason for these houses to be unoccupied and if they are available to rent whether they are offered on social rent or affordable rent?

**The Cabinet Member has responded:**

Thank you for your question.

- 1) These homes were originally planned to be sold outright on the open market, but the success of the regeneration scheme values meant that the Council could explore the opportunity to sell them as shared ownership properties whilst still returning a satisfactory capital receipt to the Housing Revenue Account.

This is good news in offering greater tenure diversity and good news for local people to have the opportunity to enter the housing market at a discounted rate. Officers have looked at a number of options, however due to the legal complexities of the Council selling this type of product for the first time, it has taken considerably longer than expected to agree terms of sale. It is expected to have the properties advertised in March. Persevering with this new council offer of affordable housing will mean it can now be quickly replicated on the future regeneration schemes.

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