

Questions on notice under Rule 12

From Councillor Dant to Councillor Cary Matthews:

I notice that the Council's project for accessing government funds through the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme only scored 'amber' on the Q3 project monitoring presented to Cabinet on the 1st March 2022. Could the portfolio holder please explain why we are not making the most of this source of funding to improve the insulation and air tightness of Lancaster's housing stock?

Councillor Matthews thanked Councillor Dant for his question. She replied:

As reported in the project monitoring highlight report, there have been some delays with this project, this is specifically as a result of the availability of Trustmark accredited and suitably skilled / available contractors locally and across Lancashire. In order to address this a breakfast and an evening event has been arranged by the Housing Advisory Group, in partnership with Lancaster and Morecambe College. This event will be in April and will promote free training and green skills initiatives available locally. The advertisement for this event is in the process of being sent to local contractors and other relevant stakeholders to try and encourage more to get involved in this work from within the District.

Lancaster City Council's funding was best secured by joining a pan-Lancashire consortium led by Blackpool Council, this was successful and funding was secured through a bid for LAD1b, with additional funding secured directly as part of LAD2. The amber rating has resulted due to the Contractors being organised locality by locality by the central programme. In the District work to properties had only started in Q3, as stated in the report, delivery is now being progressed throughout Q4 to maximise the amount of properties receiving specific qualifying measures. Additionally the City Council will continue to seek opportunities to bring in additional funding to increase and improve the energy efficiency of properties where possible.

Councillor Dant thanked Councillor Matthews for the answer, which he acknowledged had covered the supplementary question he had in mind, which would have been *"Can the portfolio holder tell us how the Council is contributing to the building up of retrofit skills within Lancaster District?"*

From Councillor Dant to Councillor Hamilton Cox:

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited and long overdue project that Lancaster Council is involved with is the redevelopment of the Canal Quarter, where the Council owns a substantial amount of land. However, I notice that in the Q3 project monitoring presented to Cabinet on the 1st March 2022, the Canal Quarter is 'on hold', still awaiting a 'detailed business case' – the project has not yet started! Could the portfolio holder please give us a timetable of when we can see some actual development?

Councillor Hamilton-Cox responded:

This is an edited version. Many recent and current elements of work being undertaken at the Canal Quarter have been well publicised. Most recently the planning portfolio holder Councillor Dowding was quoted on the appointment of Masterplan consultants PRP in December to undertake the masterplanning stage.

The council's Canal Quarter webpages have also recently been updated, to reflect the adoption into the City Council's Local Plan, of the Canal Quarter Strategic Regeneration Framework (CQSRF) as a Supplementary Planning Document and that also summarises next

steps. There was a technical glitch on project monitoring for Quarter 3. It seems as though reporting was not requested for Q3 but regular reporting will be reinstated on Q4 and that will reflect "Phase 2 – Preparation of the Masterplan" as this was the next stage agreed by Cabinet last year.

Further stakeholder/community consultation stage will be initiated following Cabinet member engagement and approval of the overall direction of the proposals. Member engagement is planned to take place in April/May.

It is also important to note that the speed of development delivery has many external influences. Inflationary pressures in the wider economy being the most notable and these are impacting on construction and labour costs across the board making projections of development viability difficult and that is reflected in the next paragraphs.

So last spring, some members were involved in the pre-application discussion for the privately owned former Mitchells brewery site. My understanding is that there are ongoing discussions with the Council over that scheme's viability. Also last year the Council looked at the viability of combining privately owned and Council owned property to bring forward a discrete development scheme. Progress on that is also subject to discussion over viability. At the end of last year, Council commissioned Masterplanners PRP to produce a discrete piece of work; this is for a block design a residential scheme for a site in Canal Quarter, which is wholly owned by the City Council and that is currently in the process of being assessed for viability.

Last week, I was approached by a developer looking to develop a site adjacent to the Canal Quarter. And I said "you're not coming forward with another student accommodation scheme are you..?" The developer said "actually, that's what I do." I said "have you not looked at the residential element of that scheme?" They said "okay, I will look at it. But I'm almost certain that values in Lancaster do not make private residential viable at the moment." You can see, I hope, that there is no lack of aspiration to deliver.

Councillor Dant thanked Councillor Hamilton-Cox for his response, saying that the information he had supplied had been very useful. He was glad to hear that things were going much better than the project monitoring had suggested in March.

By way of his supplementary question, Councillor Dant asked:

The Canal Quarter abuts what we might call the student corridor, with accommodation for a large number of young people. Can the portfolio holder assure us that accommodation developed on Council-owned land will not focus on young people, but will instead include a variety of accommodation for older people, including extra-care facility, so that they can enjoy walking to the facilities in the city. We need to see older people in the bars, shops, restaurants, cinemas and clubs, of Lancaster as well as young people.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox replied:

Yes, my recollection is that there is an extra care facility identified in the Strategic Regeneration Framework, I'll have to see what PRP, the Masterplanning consultants make of that idea.

From Councillor Dant to Councillor Dave Brookes:

During the series of storms in February – Dudley, Eunice and Franklin – much of the sand on Morecambe beach was swept onto the promenade. I understand that Council officers worked to remove the sand, but instead of returning it to the beach, they had to dispose of it. If this is correct, where did the sand go?

(Supplementary question) *How much did the operation to replace cost?*

(Councillor Brookes, having given his apologies for the meeting had supplied the written answer set out below in advance):

It's not entirely correct. Where sand isn't contaminated - which it usually isn't when blown onto the promenade - we have agreement from the Environment Agency to return it to the beach.

Where sand is blown further into town, which some was during the recent storms, it will be contaminated and is taken away for reprocessing by a waste contractor. This basically makes it a recycled aggregate which can be reused for other purposes. So far this year approximately 75 tonnes has been removed and disposed for reprocessing.

The beach doesn't get topped up in response to specific events, but every five years or so a view is taken on whether more sand is needed, and this funded by budgets help by the City Council's Engineering team.