

Questions from Councillor David Whitaker for Councillor Bottoms

Councillor Whitaker asked:

“What can The Council realistically do to address the countless boarded up shops in the West End to address the ongoing concerns of businesses in the West End?”

Councillor Bottoms replied:

I am very passionate about this and do take photos of all properties and keep records myself. Where a building is considered to be affect public amenity and is so untidy to warrant action, there are provisions under the Town and Country Planning Act.

Where a building is considered dangerous following a risk assessment carried out by qualified structural engineers, then action can be pursued under the Building Act.

Where buildings have lesser issues, such as broken doors and windows, but the structure might not be untidy or dangerous, there is potential recourse under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act.

There are also provisions under the Environmental Protection Act if the property is deemed to be causing environmental problems to adjoining properties. I have identified one such property which has been brought to my attention by West End traders.

Councillor Whitaker asked:

“Is there any funding external avenues being explored in order to address these issues?”

Councillor Bottoms replied:

There is very little external funding at the moment for commercial properties. Funding sometimes is available to bring residential properties back in to use but nothing much for commercial. As you are aware, some of these properties do have potential for residential accommodation and could bring in Council Tax, so I will be looking at that.

Councillor Whitaker asked:

“Has any progress been made in finding out who the owners of these properties are, for example, the properties on Yorkshire Street?”

Councillor Bottoms responded:

The Council uses Land Registry records to identify owners. Difficulties arise when ownership records are incomplete or absent. Where owners are identified then the local authority has pursued and will pursue, where expedient to do so, enforcement action to improve the properties' condition.

More recently, we had a meeting at the town hall with prominent Morecambe stakeholders, including Morecambe BID who are spearheading an initiative to address the number of empty properties in the town (both commercial and residential), to discuss ways in which the district partners can encourage landlords to fill vacant properties and improve their condition. Another

town has used arts and culture to revitalise properties and I value the input of other Councillors and your local knowledge to pull a plan together for this going forward.

Councillor Whitaker thanked Councillor Bottoms for his comprehensive answer. By way of a supplementary question he asked:

“Do you agree with me that we need to stop the rot and the domino impact of more boarded up properties which residents in the West End are getting really fed up of, so we need to really need to prioritise returning those properties that are boarded up into business or arts opportunities and hopefully we can make the West End a good arts hub when Eden comes?”

Councillor Bottoms replied:

Yes, I've noticed that when I attend these meetings there are lots of ideas and lots of talk yet there is no real vision or strategy and that's what we need to put together to move it forward. We need positive action and not just words.

Question from Councillor Roger Cleet for Councillor Peter Jackson

Councillor Cleet asked a question about the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Morecambe and Carnforth Town Council adopted by Lancaster City Council cabinet on 8th July 2025:

“Could the Cabinet Member explain exactly what these new arrangements are and how they will benefit the residents of Morecambe and Carnforth?”

Councillor Peter Jackson explained that MOUs were not legally binding documents. Their intention was to set up structures by which Town Councils and City Councils could better communicate, identify projects that they can take forward together and work together on. The MOUs provided for the Chief Executive to establish steering groups.

He went on to say that things said in the Chamber during the Council meeting had highlighted that communication between the City Council and the Town Councils had not always been as good as it should be, particularly in the case of Morecambe. It was necessary to build some understanding and some trust and the MOU would be the mechanism to do that.

Councillor Cleet thanked Councillor Peter Jackson for his reply.