

a) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward will ask the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance:

Can the Lead Member advise if the RBWM is still paying interest on LOBO loans and if so what rate of interest is being paid?

Written response:

The Council has the following two LOBO loans outstanding:

£5m borrowed from Barclays in 2006 at an interest rate of 4.19% that is due to be repaid in 2066

£8m borrowed from Dexia in 2008 at an interest rate of 4.19% that is due to be repaid in 2043

Barclays have waived their right to increase the interest rate on their loan, and with interest rates at historically low levels it is not expected Dexia will seek to increase their rate either as the Council would be able to repay the loan and refinance at a lower rate.

These loans form a small proportion of the Council's borrowing and the Council regularly reviews its borrowing levels and the split between long and short-term borrowing. The Council seeks to balance the benefits of low interest rates of short-term borrowing and the protection against future interest rate increases of long-term borrowing.

The Council's current borrowing strategy is for any new borrowing to be taken out on a short-term basis to take advantage of low interest rates, and in consultation with its Treasury Management advisors, to seek and review options to increase its proportion of long-term borrowing where this can be obtained at a favourable rate.

b) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader of the Council advise the approximate value of the Royal Borough's assets including those held within the RBWM Property Company?

Written response:

The total value of commercial and corporate assets is £628m. The Council's assets are divided into two separate portfolios for valuation purpose.

The commercial portfolio is revalued every year. This year the total was £81.4 million. Commercial assets held for sale, which are also revalued every year and this year were valued at £63 million. These are assets where a formal commitment within the regeneration programme has already been made to dispose of them. Both of these categories are valued to open market value and total £144.4m.

The Council also hold corporate assets, which currently stand at a value of £483.6 million. The corporate assets are re-valued every 5 years on a rolling programme according to type and/or use. The valuation assumptions for corporate properties are on existing use value and include high value specialist properties like schools and leisure centres which are valued on a depreciated replacement cost (DRC) basis and not a market basis (this is not what the properties would realise if they were sold on the open market).

RBWM Property Company Ltd – holds residential assets only. The total value of those assets as of 31st March 2020 is £3.39m. These assets are valued on a fair/open market value basis.

c) Maria Evans of Riverside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

The council has declared its directly controlled annual carbon footprint is only 0.7% of the Borough's production emissions; let alone accounting for the Borough's consumption emissions. What is your strategy to engage with other stakeholders to play their part in reducing the Borough's footprint to net-zero?

Written response:

We have made clear in the strategy document that we will only be able to deliver on the ambition of net zero if we work in partnership with others. This includes everyone from central Government, businesses, community groups to individuals in our community.

The council has a clear leadership role and we have set out the principles of our engagement plan in the strategy document itself. It specifies, to engage stakeholders to play their part, we will:

- Communicate the key objectives and actions of the strategy*
- Engage with key groups and organisations on the work that can be undertaken in partnership as we move forward.*
- Engage with residents and organisations on how they can contribute to the delivery of the strategy through the actions they take on a day to day basis. The strategy proposes several approaches, all of which are available for public view, so we hope people take the time to engage with it and feedback their thoughts to us.*
- Communicate progress on the delivery of the strategy.*

d) Andrew Elder of Eton and Castle ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

2019 was the warmest year on record in Europe; 1.2 degrees above the reference period. 1.5 degrees is the recommended limit to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Can you demonstrate that the strategy for the borough will enable actions to be fast enough? And if not, why not?

Written response:

The council have declared their ambition to have a net zero emission Borough by 2050 at the latest which is in line with the latest climate science and international consensus on limiting catastrophic climate change. The council has produced a strategy to demonstrate it is serious about taking action to meet this ambition.

Our target is in line with the UK government target and we will work hard to bring this forward as it becomes possible. The UK government put its target into law to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement, the historic international 2015 agreement on climate change which committed the world to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.

We have committed to review our trajectory of emissions to net zero based upon the latest evidence and expert advice to ensure we continue to meet our obligations and commitments.

e) Deborah Mason of Riverside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

Can you explain how this represents a consultative and collaborative approach to local democracy when critical documents relating to the Climate Strategy were not made available to the public before the question submission deadline?

Written response:

In developing the strategy, we have engaged through a series of public workshops and events to seek the views of the community. The more detailed work undertaken with specific community groups has helped to build a stronger strategy which we believe demonstrated our collaborative approach.

It is important to recognise that full Council is being asked to approve the strategy for public consultation. This will provide all residents and other stakeholders to provide their views which we will consider and make appropriate changes to the strategy before we adopt it.

f) Fiona Hewer of Bisham and Cookham ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Does the Council consider the Phase 1 Habitat Survey conducted by Wild Maidenhead in 2017 a suitable baseline for measuring improvements to biodiversity in the Climate Strategy and, if not, what do you propose?

Written response:

We welcome the work that has already been undertaken and it provides a great starting point. The council has committed to develop a biodiversity baseline and metrics for the borough based on the work already undertaken in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Study and by the local 'Wild Groups'.

We need to undertake the actions set out in our strategy and welcome the opportunity to work with you to determine the most suitable baseline to be able to fulfil this commitment outlined in the draft strategy.

g) Mike Copland of Bisham and Cookham ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Unmanaged access to sensitive habitats, for example for dog-walking and watersports, is likely to decrease biodiversity. Can the Lead Member reassure me of the Council's commitment to implementing an Environment and Climate Emergency strategy by giving examples of when and how expert advice on biodiversity protection has taken precedence over such 'business as usual' activities?

Written response:

We recognise the importance of biodiversity and therefore the natural environment has been highlighted as one of four key themes within the strategy document. This includes setting up a new 'Natural Capital' programme that will enable the council to manage its natural environment projects in a co-ordinated way.

We have committed to a net gain in biodiversity of 10% over the next five years in the strategy document and the new programme will help us achieve that. In addition, we have set an objective to increase awareness of biodiversity to ensure that council officers and the wider community are better educated to support us in this challenge.

h) Mike Copland of Bisham and Cookham ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Given that the Council has, in declaring the Emergency, recognised the existential threat we face can the Lead Member confirm that commitments or assumptions made before the Emergency was declared will be subject to review and that addressing climate change and enhancing biodiversity and our natural capital will take priority unless there are other exceptional considerations?

Written response:

The strategy document makes clear that this strategy will be a priority across every part of the council. It will require officers and members to work together to review council policies to ensure they are compatible with our commitment to deliver carbon emissions to net zero as well as the clear objectives in each of the four key themes.

Our other strategies will need to be reviewed in light of our commitments on climate change to support our overall commitment to net zero by 2050. The actions set out in this strategy will support those changes and set policy direction for any new or emerging strategies.

i) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

The LPA informed me that it was not mandatory for planning panels to be presented with factually correct information *provided* any falsehoods were given “in good faith”. What process is followed to determine “good faith” where falsehoods are subsequently identified, and why aren't such matters returned automatically to the Member panel for reconsideration with the corrected known facts?

Written response:

All decisions taken by the Council's Planning Panels are taken based on the information that is before them at the time. Decisions on planning applications are final once the decision notice has been issued and as such it is not possible for a decision to be returned to the Panel.

j) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

Given Deloitte's finding that the valuation of Council assets and RBWM Property Company Limited assets are being “commissioned and conducted” under just one set of shared instructions, can you explain why this company is no longer acting as an arms-length trading company, and state whether that company's MD is formally considered an officer of RBWM itself?

Written response:

RBWM Property Company Ltd is a company wholly owned by the Council. The commissioning of the valuation report was done jointly as the RBWM Property Company's asset base is small in comparison to the Council's. The appointment of the valuer was done under a fully compliant procurement process. RBWM Property Company has to follow the same procurement regulations as the council.

RBWM Property Company has its own independent board and works under a shareholder protocol agreement. The company is arms length from the Council. The Managing Director of RBWM Property Company is not an officer of the Council.

k) Jennifer Shaw of Belmont Ward will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

We are now emerging from a slow onset, extensive crisis into another - Climate Change. What specific actions to address the environment and climate emergency will

you commence now to capture the gains made, practical and behavioural, during the Covid-19 crisis?

Written response:

The strategy sets out objectives and actions across all areas of the council. The sustainability team sits within the service that is co-ordinating the recovery planning for the covid-19 crisis which will help to ensure we are promoting a green recovery.

One practical example is the recent submission for funding to the Department for Transport to introduce changes in our town centres to support walking and cycling. As a council we have taken the opportunity to reduce travel to and from our offices which has positive impacts on carbon emissions.

We also recognise the important role the community has played in the covid-19 response. We are now working with our community volunteers and organisations to understand how we can continue to work together, and any lessons learnt can be applied to the development and delivery of our climate strategy.

l) Dave Scarbrough of Belmont ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

In order to reach net-zero in the Borough and in the whole country by 2050, do you agree that we need to leave all fossil fuels in the ground and all new electricity generation must be by renewable means?

Written response:

Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels is undoubtedly very important. In the UK, emissions from electricity generation have fallen by 50% since 2013 (based on evidence from the Committee on Climate Change in 2019). This is significant progress in a very short period of time. The amount of renewable capacity being added to the grid each year is significant.

There is still a need for electricity to be generated on very short notice to meet the peaks in demand. This new electricity generation may need to continue come from fossil fuels in the short to medium term, but we expect that as battery and demand management technology improves, it will be possible to phase this out.

The UK is also currently reliant on natural gas for heating with one of the most comprehensive gas networks in the world. The government has plans to decarbonise gas grid with the use of alternatives such as biomethane. We recognise the need to transition and as part of our new strategy will encourage the most polluting homes in the Borough, namely those using oil for heating to move to low carbon alternatives.

m) Claire Taylor of Eton and Castle ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Understanding that the financial situation of the council has been made even worse by the Covid-19 emergency, will the Council contract work on a biodiversity action plan (and other work to implement the strategy) to local voluntary groups who will likely be able to take the work forward at low or no cost?

Written response:

We have identified the need to work with local voluntary groups to support the delivery of the climate strategy. As set out in the strategy, the action plan will be developed into a full delivery plan that will set out the scope of every action and how they will be delivered. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further through the proposed stakeholder advisory board to identify the best way to deliver each action.

n) Sarah Scarbrough of Belmont ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

The interim strategy lacks detail and input from RBWM's CEC. What do you expect will be gained from a public consultation on the interim strategy as it stands?

Written response:

This strategy presented to full council is the result of a series of public workshops and events which included members of the RBWM CEC and other key stakeholders.

In addition to this, the RBWM CEC and three other groups representing each of the strategy's four themes were given the opportunity to comment on the document itself. These comments were considered and the majority were incorporated. Stakeholders including RBWM CEC received written responses to their comments which explained whether their comments could be incorporated and the rationale behind this.

The public consultation offers an opportunity for all residents in the Borough to provide their views and feedback on our climate and environment strategy. It also provides an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of the issues and improve engagement with communities and businesses on the climate crisis.

o) Georgina Ellis of Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Does the Lead Member agree with me that lack of good biodiversity action planning leads to food insecurity, poorer health and increased flood risk? Can the Council explain why a biodiversity action plan has not been a priority for RBWM despite repeated offers from voluntary groups to help with the implementation of this vital element of the Climate Strategy?

Written response:

We recognise the importance of biodiversity and this is why the natural environment has been highlighted as one of four key themes within the strategy document. This includes setting up a new 'Natural Capital' programme that will enable the council to manage its natural environment projects in a co-ordinated way to support biodiversity.

We understand the frustration from some people who want faster progress on specific issues and projects. However, it is important that we have the right overall approach to tackling the climate emergency that allows us to prioritise the right activities to ensure we meet our overall ambitions of being net zero by 2050 at the latest.

p) Sarah Bowden of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

Given that the inspection of the Borough Local Plan will not now happen until Autumn, will the Council commit to immediately draft and put in place in 2020 a Supplementary Planning Document that stipulates the actions required to prevent making the Environment and Climate Emergency situation any worse?

Written response:

It is correct that the Stage 2 BLP hearing sessions will now not happen until the Autumn, but there is a significant amount of work required to prepare for these hearing sessions. Earlier this month the Local Plan Inspector issued her Stage 2 Matters, Issues and Questions, along with a request that the Council responds to every question. There are over 200 questions, many of which raise complex issues, requiring detailed input from consultant advisors, as well as Officers in other departments.

It is important that development in the borough supports our ambition to be net zero by 2050 at the latest. Many of the policies in the Borough Local Plan seek to address directly or indirectly matters in relation to the environment and climate change, and getting the Borough Local Plan through the examination process and adopted remains a Council priority.

The draft Environment and Climate Strategy put before council this evening, sets out an action to prepare more detailed advice in Supplementary Planning Documents but this will need to sit under the new Borough Local Plan once it is adopted.

q) Rachel Cook of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

Given that it is an important part of the National Planning Policy Framework, why have biodiversity measures such as ecological appraisal and habitat connectivity been omitted from the Borough Wide Design Guide SPD, and will you commit to including those amendments suggested by Wild Maidenhead?

Written response:

The Borough Local Plan Proposed Changes Policy NR2 incorporates a requirement that development proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they maintain, protect and enhance the biodiversity of application sites including features of conservation value (such as hedgerows, trees, river corridors and other water bodies and the presence of protected species). It also requires new developments to identify areas where there is an opportunity for biodiversity to be improved including through recognising the importance of green corridors. Subsection 4 of that policy specifically requires that development proposals must be accompanied by ecological reports in accordance with BS 42020, to aid the assessment of proposals.

As such, the Council's expectation on developers in relation to enhancing and protecting biodiversity is clearly spelled out in the emerging BLP

It is not necessary to repeat these requirements in the Borough Wide Design Guide, as relevant planning applications will be considered against the policies in the Borough Local Plan, as well as against the more detailed requirements set out in Supplementary Planning Documents, including the Borough Wide Design Guide.

The Borough Wide Design Guide SPD does refer to biodiversity measures, some of which have been strengthened following consultation on the draft version.

Finally, further opportunities for connecting wildlife and habitats will be addressed in the forthcoming Green and Blue Infrastructure SPD.

r) Emily Tomalin of Bisham and Cookham ward will ask the following question of Councillor Clark, Lead Member for Transport and Infrastructure:

Ghentrification for Cyclists! Can RBWM copy the simple, bold, low cost strategy of Ghent, where traffic was discouraged from town centres with filters on side roads that stopped cars, allowed bicycles, reducing speed limits to 20 mph and giving cyclists clear priority? Motor vehicles could still access all areas but only by travelling outside the town and in again, between segments.

Written response:

We have reviewed the Ghent example and, as a Borough, are considering where and how the use of filters, pop-up cycle space and priority crossings can benefit local journeys. All of our cycling ambitions are based on the valuable work that went into the Cycling Action Plan 2018-2028. This used local trip data and input from local residents' groups to identify routes and measures to prioritise. At the moment we are pursuing a 20mph zone for Maidenhead Town Centre and have identified where and how the current available funding can best benefit everyone, including cyclists, to allow people to make the journeys they want to make.

The first step is additional monitoring, which we are currently undertaking. Our intention is to apply for the Emergency Active Travel Fund currently being made available by the Department for Transport to help deliver the Cycle Action Plan. This fund is for pop-up bike lanes, wider pavements, safer junctions, and cycle and bus-only corridors. The borough has already applied for the first tranche of this Emergency

Active Travel funding (we have yet to hear the outcome) and we will soon be applying for the second tranche of funding. The second tranche forms the larger portion of potential funding.

The local character of the Borough means that for Maidenhead, Windsor and Ascot, there are only a few access points to High Streets and town centres. This does not make the implementation of filters straight forward, as it means that they have a significant impact on all traffic movements. For this reason it is felt necessary for such a decision to be fully considered. Once the benefits are better understood we will move forward accordingly.”

s) Emily Tomalin of Bisham and Cookham ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

Would the Council consider a new planning designation to encourage local organic food production? Many areas are poorly used agriculturally in the hope that houses could be built. Instead could the Council find a way to encourage small holdings or allotments?

Written response:

Unfortunately, the planning system cannot be used to directly control whether food production is organic (or non-organic), and nor can the planning system be used to directly control where any food grown in the Borough is sold and consumed.

However, the Proposed Changes version of the BLP does include Policy QP2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure), and this policy requires development proposals to contribute to the maintenance, enhancement, and where possible, enlargement of the Borough’s existing green and blue infrastructure, which includes allotments, community gardens/orchards and urban farms.

In addition, the Site Allocation Proformas included in the BLP specifically require some of the sites allocated for development to provide new allotments and/ or community gardens and orchards.

I therefore believe that the BLP will help maintain land that can be used for local food production, as well as creating new allotments and/ or community gardens and orchards, as part of the Plan’s strong place-making agenda. This is reinforced through the climate strategy objectives to promote sustainable food production, including an action to provide more opportunities for people to ‘grow their own’.

t) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

The BLP under examination will increase carbon emissions by 22.5%. The Inspector now asks whether the proposed additional Policy SP2 is effective in meeting the requirements, under Section 19(1A) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, to

include policies securing that development contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. How does the Lead Member propose to respond?

Written response:

As a country and a borough, we have committed to be net zero by 2050, at the latest. To achieve this will require carbon emission reductions across a whole range of sectors and activities. The climate strategy sets out the key areas of focus to 2050, with an action plan for the next five years to support transition to net zero. We welcome your views on the strategy in the forthcoming public consultation.

The RBWM Planning Policy Team is currently working through all the Matters, Issues and Questions, ensuring a comprehensive response is ready for submission by 7th August 2020.

The Inspector has asked several questions in relation to Policy SP2, and in responding, Officers will be taking into account legal advice, as well as the wide range of policies and proposals in the BLP that directly (or indirectly) address the requirement to contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

The work undertaken by the Council does not suggest or support the proposition that the BLP will increase carbon emissions by 22.5% and the Council strongly considers that the proposed changes to the plan, including the addition of Policy SP2, strengthen the Plan in terms of climate change and biodiversity.

u) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:

Is the Lead Member satisfied that the Cabinet invested sufficient time in challenging the deliverability, from a legal and compliance standpoint, of the incremental residents' parking permit income as well as the other opportunities and savings relied upon in setting a balanced budget for 2020/21?

Written response:

When setting a balanced budget for 2020/21 almost £5.5m of savings proposals were identified. Each of these savings will have been considered in terms of their deliverability including the actions and steps that would need to be taken to ensure planned delivery. Prior to the budget being agreed at full council in February 2020, it was considered at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny too.

Whilst significant due diligence is undertaken to provide reassurance that all aspects that may affect delivery of any saving have been considered, in the case of the parking permit income it was identified after the budget was set that the intended way to deliver the scheme was incorrect. This will have an impact in the financial year 2020/21 and means the council will have to manage the financial implications of this in year by finding alternative savings and take other steps to manage our resources.

For this financial year, a new tracker has been introduced as part of the budget monitoring process which tracks intended savings delivery and identifies any risks to

delivery and identifies any alternative options to manage resources appropriately. This will be included in our publicly available monitoring reports which will be considered at Cabinet on a bi-monthly basis, starting from July.

v) Susy Shearer of Clewer East Ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

'The greenest building is the one already standing.' Recycling existing buildings including heritage assets takes maximum advantage of already utilised energy and materials. Furthermore, re-using those with even average energy performance consistently offers immediate climate change impact reductions as compared with more energy-efficient types of new construction. How will these principles be reflected in the Climate Strategy?

Written response:

This will clearly depend on the specific example. Using low carbon building techniques, it is possible to construct buildings that have both low embedded and operational carbon. Existing buildings can be expensive to retrofit and heritage buildings may well have conservation considerations.

We recognise that 'existing buildings' make up the vast majority of buildings that we will have in 2050 and we will need to tackle those to get to net zero. As part of our strategy, we will prioritise projects based on a number of factors including how much carbon emission reductions they will deliver. We will also be working with businesses in the Borough to encourage them to consider the buildings they operate from.

w) Susy Shearer of Clewer East Ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

An estimated 25% of car journeys in the Borough are under 2 miles yet are a major contributor to CO₂, NO₂ and noise pollution and community severance. What specific measures will be included in the Climate Strategy to shift these journeys away from cars and towards walking, cycling and public transport?

Written response:

The climate strategy sets out an ambition to decarbonise transport and incentivise more use of active transport modes. This will help tackle pollution and carbon emissions issues you set out and improve people's health and wellbeing. It contains a number of specific measures to achieve this.

Delivery of our current cycling action plan is an important first step. It aims to increase cycling journeys by 50% by 2028. Opportunities for people to walking and cycle more will be identified in new 'growth areas' as part of development planning too.

In addition, the strategy sets out public transport usage will be incentivised; through the investigation of options for demand responsive transport in the borough. The

climate strategy also recognises that the best way of reducing emissions is to avoid unnecessary travel. It commits to facilitate the roll out of digital infrastructure in the borough to enable flexible working.

The strategy recognises that some journeys will still need to be made by car. To minimise the impact of this, and to further reduce air pollution and carbon emissions issues you set out; we will support the reduction in emissions of these journeys through infrastructure provision for electric vehicles charging.