

Questions from members of the public

For Full Council on Wednesday 21 April 2021

Question 1

From Michael Tapp

“I understand the unfortunate need for new housing in the South East but we must balance this with protecting the environment and combating climate change. Can we expect to see every new house built with solar panels on the roofs, electric charging points in the driveways and the highest standards of insulation? This will cost developers less than retrospective fitting and will help balance our impact on the environment.”

Question 2

From Marieke de Jonge

“Whereas a Citizens’ Assembly prescribes engagement of trained and impartial facilitators (ref. 1.7) and includes a period of deliberation amongst participants allowing them to put their ideas forward and come to a conclusion, a Panel or a Jury do not offer this level of engagement. Instead, a Citizen’s Panel merely puts matters in front of some participants for consultation (ref. 1.15) rather than seeking ideas generated by the public.

Given that the original motion sets out an ambition to reduce not just the council’s own, but the wider borough’s carbon emissions to achieve net zero by 2030, does the Full Council, who voted for a Citizens’ Assembly, not feel it is essential that a sizeable proportion of local residents put forward possible solutions so as to ensure wide consensus and public support, and therefore elect to go ahead with the full Citizens’ Assembly?”

Question 3

From Adrian Thorne

“21 months ago the full council voted to hold a citizens' assembly. Nearly two years later the town's citizen assembly has not even started. To give the council comparisons: Worthing council declared a climate emergency in the same month as Tunbridge Wells - their report was fully published 4 months ago now, having moved online during COVID. Many other councils have finished in a shorter time frame, all despite COVID. Tunbridge Wells hasn't even started, in fact the council executive hasn't even decided what and when to start. Given that this is an important opportunity for the public to have their say on the most pressing issue of our age, can the council leader explain why public input is being avoided and disregarded?”

Question 4

From James Tansley

“Please can the Council confirm or deny reports that the supplier to whom it paid £43,404 between May 2019 and February 2021 for unspecified work in relation to the Assembly Hall, and whose details the Council has not only redacted from its website, but also declined to reveal in response to a Freedom of Information request, has a family connection to a member of Council staff.”

Question 5

From Adrian Thorne

“Does the council accept and understand that the three options presented in the CEAP report will provide differing results? It is not the case that they will all produce roughly the same result, but perhaps some will be quicker or cheaper. They are different processes, with different levels of public input and support. By selecting the Panel or Jury options, the council will be significantly reducing the public chance to be involved in this issue?”

Question 6

From James Tansley

“Please can the Council provide details of all breaches by Council officials and Councillors of the fifth of the Nolan principles of Public Life, which states that: “Holders of public office ... should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing” in the last year.”

Question 7

From Adrian Thorne

“Can the council provide assurance, that financial resources for the citizens' assembly project will not suffer as a result of the delays of the executive. I can understand the temptation to claim COVID lockdown has made a full citizens' assembly financially difficult, however, the council had 8 months before the pandemic when it could have acted - as many councils did.”

Question 8

From James Tansley

“Please can the Council provide details of all breaches by Council officials and Councillors of the fourth of the Nolan principles of Public Life, which states that “Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this” in the last year. Please can the Council provide details of all breaches by Council officials and Councillors of the second of the Nolan principles of Public Life, which states that: “Holders of public office should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends [and]... must declare and resolve any interests and relationships” in the last year.”