

Annual Council – 22 May 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Sigurd Reimers	<p>In February, Somerset Wildlife Trust published a position statement on the continuing problem of peat extraction#. This practice is responsible for approximately 5% of all human-produced emissions of greenhouse gases globally. Greenhouse gases are largely responsible for the devastating problem of global warming.</p> <p>Following their declaration of a climate and ecological emergency in 2021, Somerset Council and its predecessors have carried out some important work in this area. This is of course particularly important in a county like ours which is almost unique in still permitting the extraction of peat. Somerset (County) Council’s 2016 Mineral Plan, following on its 2013 document <i>Mineral Topics Paper 3: Peat Reserves and Supply</i>, now severely dated, started addressing the problem, but progress has been too slow. Although quality peat-free products have been available for years, the sale of peat continues, often indirectly: amateur gardening accounts for 66% of all sales of peat in this country. It is hoped that Parliament will have debated this issue on 17th May (Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill), including a proposal to ban the sale of peat by the end of 2024.</p> <p>Question 1a – What steps is Somerset Council itself taking to bring this dangerous practice to an end?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Dixie Darch</p>
David Redgewell	<p>Question 2a what progress is being made on purchase and Redevelopment of Yeovil bus and coach station and shopping centre Developments,</p> <p>In a report to last full council,</p> <p>The Executive member for Planning and Reeneration councillor Ros wyke stated the shopping centre and Bus and coach station would be demolition with grant money from the Department for levelling up,</p> <p>As part of this scheme once the council has purchased the shopping centre from the Northern Ireland property Group, company,</p> <p>What plans does the council now have as owners of the shopping centre and Bus and coach station,</p>

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To keep the waiting room and Toilets facilities open at the bus and coach station Including First Group plc offices and Drivers mess room and supervisor office, bus shelters repairs
Keeping the kiosk open for passengers and looking at the future of the cafe
It is very important the this Regional bus and coach station that services bus and coach Network across Yeovil and into Somerset and Dorset is kept open
For bus network provided by First group plc South buses Division and First group plc Wales and West buses Division, South west coaches group
Somerset council own bus company .
Berry coaches part of megabus Scottish City link coaches network and Flixbus coaches network to Wincanton bus and coach station, Amebury and London Hammersmith and Taunton from coaches to Exeter, Plymouth Cornwall and North Devon,
Rail link bus service to Yeovil pen mill station First group plc Great Western Railway company service to Dorchester west and Weymouth, For Bournemouth and Poole,
Castle cary, Bruton Westbury, Frome, Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon, Bath spa, keynsham and Bristol Temple meads,
Castle cary for London Paddington, Taunton, Exeter St David Plymouth North Road and Penzance or North Devon, and Torbay,
Yeovil Junction railway station First group plc MTR South Western Railway company, for Railway services to London Waterloo via Salisbury and services to Crewrence, Axminster, Exeter Central and Exeter St Davids ,
So what is the present proposal for Yeovil bus and coach station and shopping centre under Somerset council ownership,

Question 2b,

With the purchase of Yeovil bus and coach station and Yeovil shopping centre, and the council proposal to demolish the. Shopping centres car park and bus and coach station,
What provision is in place by Somerset council to crate a Temporary bus and coach station, similar to the Temporary bus and coach station at built at Bath spa durring the shopping centre redevelopment that included waiting room facilities, Shelters
Temporary public toilets including disabled facilities,
Staff accommodation for Drivers and supervisor and Kiosk/ cafe facilities and information points,

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Question 2c,

With regards to the Somerset bus service improvement plan,

What discussion have the Somerset council had with the rest of the county of Somerset on the bus service Network including ,North Somerset council, and the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and Banes council ,bus services improvement plan, with Devon County Council bus service improvement plan, Wiltshire Council and Swindon bus services improvement plans

But especially with new administration in Dorset and the importance of Yeovil and District bus and coach Network into Dorset with cross boundary bus services CR5 Yeovil bus and coach station to Sherborne Railway station

Sherborne Town centre and Dorchester,

Operated by South west coaches for Dorset Council,

service 58 58 a Yeovil bus and coach station Yeovil pen mill station, Sherborne Town Sherborne Railway station Templecombe

Wincanton bus and coach station,

Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Somerset and Dorset Councils,

CR6 Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill, Sherborne Town centre, Sherborne Railway station, strumister Newton, and Blandford Forum,

Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Dorset Council,

Service CR4 Yeovil bus and coach station to crewrence Beaminster and Bridport bus and coach station,

Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Dorset Council,

This along with the importance of bus Depot facilities in Yeovil for maintenance of bus and coaches for Dorset and south Somerset council area by working together to improve the area bus and coach Network through the council bus service improvement plans and Western Gateway Transport Board and Peninsula Transport Board,

Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins

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Rosa Kell	<p>Question 3a – The bus travelling public of Taunton, are being inconvenienced on a daily basis by the closure of the Bus Station at Castle Way. We are unable to understand how this site can be used for a vintage bus experience when passengers can safely board buses but this site is not available for daily bus travel. I therefore would like to ask the council if it can advise us bus passengers of their target date by which the Taunton Mobility Hub should be open?</p> <p>Question 3b Can we have confirmation that it will have a waiting room, refreshment area and WCs?</p> <p>Question 3c Has the DfT set any deadline by which the Taunton Mobility Hub must be open?</p> <p>Question 3d Is there any risk that further delay could result in the DfT funding for the Taunton Mobility Hub being withdrawn?</p> <p>We have asked other committees for updates and to date no satisfactory response has been received.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
Nigel Behan	<p>Question 4a In a recent summary of a debate on the future of social housing posted on the LGA website Debate on the future of social housing, House of Commons it was noted:</p> <p>A generational step-change in council housebuilding is required to boost housing supply, help families struggling to meet housing costs, and tackle housing waiting lists.</p> <p>And</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over recent decades, construction of new homes has failed to keep pace with population growth, demographics and socio-demographic change, particularly due to the decline public house building. At the same time, the stock of social homes has

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significantly reduced as councils have struggled to replace homes lost through Right to Buy. The housing shortage has seen rents and property prices rise significantly faster than incomes, acutely impacting the lowest income and vulnerable families and individuals. Compared to the private rental sector and homes at affordable rent, social homes provide a genuinely affordable alternative and greater security of tenancy. For many people, social housing remains the only feasible option due to the widening gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents.

Councils are determined that all tenants should have the security of a safe and well-maintained home. Councils manage more than 1.6 million homes, carry out millions of repairs each year and invest billions in housing services. The majority of social housing landlords are responsible and provide high quality homes for people to live in, and councils are determined to ensure that poor conditions and repairs are swiftly and satisfactorily addressed.

Moreover:

Funding remains one of the key barriers local authorities face in delivering more social homes. The lifting of the HRA borrowing cap in 2018, which allows local authorities to borrow against expected rental income, has had a positive impact on planned levels of council house building. Councils stand ready to rapidly scale up investment in new builds and the existing housing stock when further funding is made available. However, to meet our ambitions for social housing, there are a range of policy and fiscal interventions that councils need from Government:

And

Access to affordable borrowing

To fund the supply of social housing we have long been calling for councils to have access to lower borrowing rates through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). Government announced in the Spring Budget that they will bring forward a new discounted Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) policy margin to support local authorities borrowing for Housing Revenue Accounts and the

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delivery of social housing, which is positive and will help provide much needed additional support for vital council housebuilding projects.

What will this Council practically do to increase (significantly) council house building across the former District Council areas In Somerset?

Question 4b In [Reforms and resistance: how tenants can influence housing policy](#) it was stated:

“Yet, after many years of relatively little activity there has been a noticeable growth in grassroots resistance on housing issues. Much of the academic work on housing does not portray tenants as active agents who can influence or even change their living conditions. The analysis tends to focus on the nature, history and potential impact of particular policies and processes in housing. But historically, grassroots campaigning has had a significant influence on the nature of housing at both local and national levels. Furthermore in the current environment housing campaigns are being sparked by the failing policies of successive governments.

An example of this reform-resistance dynamic is the campaigning, over the past two decades, by [Defend Council Housing](#) (DCH). DCH was formed when campaigners who had been opposing the emerging large-scale voluntary stock transfers of council housing to housing associations, recognised the need to fight at both the estate (local) level and the national government level. Over the intervening period, DCH has had a greater impact than is often recognised, supporting tenants to secure anti-transfer (privatisation) votes in approximately a quarter of all proposals in England. These votes resulted in very real benefits with council tenants retaining their accountable, secure tenancies. At a national level, the early DCH successes forced the New Labour government to develop an alternative policy of [Arm’s Length Management Organisations](#).

There were campaigns in Somerset to retain the council housing stock successful in Taunton Deane (and almost in South Somerset) where council tenants were actively involved in “retaining their accountable, secure tenancies.”

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	<p>How does this council intend to involve service users, citizens, residents, electors (and council tenants) meaningfully in moving “.....towards a housing system that is based on the need for secure, decent shelter – not the priorities of finance or the market”?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts</p>
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Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
<p>Cllr Leigh Redman</p>	<p>Debate not hate update.</p> <p>I would like to ask a question of the CEO and Leader of council.</p> <p>A year or so ago this council supported my motion unanimously, Debate not Hate is too me an important part of my political role, as leader of a small group on a big council being able to compromise and work cross party is essential in order to get things done for the people I represent and everyone in Somerset. My heart was filled with joy when this LGA promoted issue was agreed unanimously.</p> <p>When I put the motion, I made reference to an aspiration that the motion would be council wide, looking inward and out, I have to admit that after the last 2 full council meetings, I was not assured that all members were on board with the heart of the motion, I was shocked to see members leaning across their tables to shout across the floor on more than one occasion. Not a good impression for anyone looking in.</p> <p>Question 1a</p> <p>Can council have an update on steps taken and actions implemented following the motion please?</p> <p>Thank you and Stay safe,</p>

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	Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans
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