

**Members' Supplementary questions and responses arising from the original questions submitted to the Council meeting held on 27 September 2012; and written response [previously circulated]**

**Q1. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay**

Can the Mayor update us, then, on the marketing of the old Wallsend police station site, which together with the library site would make an attractive proposition to developers and providers of social housing?

**Answer**

The Council own the Alexandra Street Housing Unit, whilst the Wallsend Police Station site is owned by the Northumbria Police Authority (NPA). A joint marketing exercise for both sites was carried out in April 2012. Five bids were received, however none of the schemes were initially satisfactory in all of the key areas of planning, highways, affordable housing provision, tenure, and price. Since then further negotiations have followed with the two bidders closest to satisfying all of the above criteria. Discussions are ongoing, and it is hoped that a satisfactory scheme can be agreed upon soon.

However, in meeting additional planning or affordable housing regulations, the bids may have to be reduced. The Police Authority have indicated that if the bids are reduced too far, they may withdraw from the joint exercise and market the police station individually.

The Library site has not been included in any marketing or discussions.

**Q2. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay**

I am sure that the Mayor will join with me in applauding the achievements of companies such as OGN, SMD and others in regenerating the north banks of the Tyne. What encouragement, guidance and support is the council giving to schools and companies to work together to ensure that the children have the right skills and qualities to take up the opportunities being offered by the renewable energy industry and can you tell us about the development of the Learning Village intended to support our future industries?

**Answer**

The Council has recently been successful in the outline application for an European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant to refurbish and regenerate the current buildings on the Swan Hunter site. This includes the establishment of a business incubator and Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SME's) accommodation to house new and existing start-ups, micro enterprises and SMEs, including those in the supply chain to the businesses which will be located on the Enterprise Zone. This also includes research and development facilities which will provide workshop space for

businesses to use to carry out research and testing for their business development. This, alongside a proposed facility to improve access to vocational education for 14 – 19 year olds related to growth areas in the economy, makes up the vision for the Learning Village. To achieve this the Council is working with the North Tyneside Learning Trust and its partners in the development of a 14 -19 skills, enterprise and employability model for the Swan Hunter site for the September 2014 opening.

In addition, these facilities will include a Fab Lab, a fully kitted branded fabrication workshop. This is designed to foster innovation closely linked to education and training within the STEM field. The aim is to put science, digital fabrication and learning into the hands of the individual through hands-on testing. Fab Labs specifically provide access for schools and colleges, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship and a hands-on experience of STEM and engineering at an early age. Structured activity days can be mapped to various subjects within the national curriculum and sessions which can be tailored around individual projects.

It is considered that providing dedicated business incubator space on the same site and expansion accommodation for micro businesses and SMEs would provide an integrated centre of excellence to help develop young entrepreneurs.

Upon the final submission and approval of the full ERDF application (to be known Spring 2013), ERDF will fund a 50% match contribution of £2.75m. The Council's match funding is contained in the Council Capital Plan.

**Q3. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay**

I am pleased that the council's policy for maintenance of gullies is under review.

Can I be reassured that drainage from the concreting over of the little remaining farmland in Wallsend will not overpower the older sewers and cause flooding further into the town and can we have guarantees that the maintenance of gullies will improve to meet the current let alone future demand? Flood planning will be irrelevant unless there is greater emphasis on maintenance and updating of infrastructure?

**Answer**

As previously noted, Flood Risk Assessment of planning applications for new development are undertaken by applicants in accordance with the guidance provided within the National Planning Policy Framework. The Environment Agency are consulted on major planning applications and they review the flood risk assessments as part of the consultee role.

The gully maintenance regime is under review.

It is important to note that no matter what action the Council or any of its partners take there can never be any guarantees regarding the potential of flooding.

**Q4. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay**

What support has the Mayor been able to offer to traders in Wallsend town centre and when can we realistically expect to see a revitalised shopping offer in the town centre?

**Answer**

I am pleased to be able to report that a range of initiatives have been delivered to promote all town centres which are supported by the full-time Town Centres Manager. New retail start-up businesses are being created by the Business Factory project and the Retail Centres Task Group work has included:

- the creation of an innovative web site – [www.tynetown.co.uk](http://www.tynetown.co.uk) – for all businesses - commissioning of creative consultancy support for retail businesses across the town centres
- implementation of a 'shop front' grant scheme
- establishment of a comprehensive programme of town centre-based activities, events, festivals, markets, etc
- introduction of town centre CCTV and other town centre policing initiatives
- support for the town centre Business Associations and Chambers of Trade
- streetwork improvements including the introduction of hanging baskets and Christmas lights, new seating, pavement renovations etc
- work to help reduce voids in town centres
- one to one work with individual businesses in the town centres
- pilot projects to increase the use of social media within retail businesses; and
- various marketing initiatives

The Council has recently awarded High Street Innovation Funding and a number of additional initiatives are being explored including free wi-fi for the town centres, enhanced marketing assistance and a comprehensive web based social media programme.

NewRiver were granted planning consent in September and there is a 3 month period for Judicial Review of that decision. The Council are therefore currently awaiting a detailed programme for the proposed works, which are likely to begin early in the New Year with the refurbishment of the former In Shops and then the reconstruction of the former Co-op and general refurbishment of the existing shopping centre. Once this information is received details will be posted on the Council's website.

**Q10. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Ord**

What proportion of subscriptions to the garden waste\Brown Bin charge are from people on Council Tax Benefit?

**Answer**

While the Council holds data on both the subscribers and those people in receipt of Council Tax Benefits, cross-referencing 10k subscribers so far to the Council Tax Benefit database would take disproportionate time and investment in ICT costs.

**Q11. Supplementary question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Ord**

The current cut off of £16,000 is based on the notion of assumed income from savings. £16,000 is equivalent to benefits claimants receiving a return of 10% on savings. This is utterly unrealistic. Will the mayor assure us that she will raise the limit to £32,000 to reflect a more realistic, if uncommon, possibility of 5% return on savings?

**Answer**

The national scheme has been in place for a number of years and is seen as fair in treatment of capital/savings, hence the proposal to keep the capital/savings levels as they are in the proposed localised scheme. The current scheme allows for the following:

Up to £16,000 of capital/savings without being excluded from the Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

For people of working age, the first £6,000 of capital/savings is disregarded.

For every £250 above £6,000 there is an assumed tariff income of £1 per week. Therefore for each £250 above the £6,000 threshold the claimant is assumed to have income of £52 per year this represents nearly 20%

For pensioners the first £10,000 of capital/savings is disregarded. For every £500 above £10,000 there is an assumed tariff income of £1 per week. In effect for each £500 above the £10,000 threshold the claimant is assumed to have income of £52 per year, this represents nearly 10%.