

Public Questions Under Standing Order 27.5.

Question from Bob Comlay, resident of Havant.

“Good afternoon Madam Mayor, good afternoon Councillors.

I am not here today to represent Havant Civic Society or its members. I am here to represent the thousands of council tax payers who take the time to read, analyse and comment on the planning applications that you publish. The hundreds of hours of knowledgeable community scrutiny that these individuals provide, deserve your attention and respect.

The regeneration of Havant Borough and the communities, countryside and shorelines which that embraces, requires a holistic and inclusive approach. Every major planning application that you consider will have an impact, positive or negative, on the achievement of the long term vision, a vision that should be created in partnership with the residents and the local independent businesses.

‘Levelling up’ and ‘building back better’, to the residents, means providing the kind of affordable housing and sustainable employment that will drive improvement in educational standards for our children and our grandchildren, while providing a safe and pleasant environment in which we can all live and work.

The long term health and well-being of the Borough should be of paramount importance, with the interests of commercial landowners balanced against the real needs of the community.

Members of the public devote a considerable amount of time and provide important local context when providing input on planning matters. Decisions should only be made after detailed and effective scrutiny of input from all sources, the officers, the applicant and the community. The level of scrutiny witnessed here in meetings, however, often lacks the depth, challenge, debate and balance necessary to provide the assurance that the decision being made is sound.

Right now, residents’ faith that their voice carries any weight in the business of this council is extremely low.

The salaries of officers and the expenses of the council members are funded through the taxes and charges that we pay, and in return we expect you to engage with us, listen to us, and understand that our view counts.

There are some in this chamber who regularly demonstrate that they understand this, but there are many others who seem not to.

My question to the Council is this:

What actions will you take to rebuild trust with the community you serve and how do you propose to measure the effectiveness of those actions?

Thank you, Madam Mayor.”

Response from Councillor Pike, HBC Cabinet Lead for Regeneration

“Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you to Mr Comlay for his question and taking the time to come and deliver it to us this evening.

I am replying, but clearly your question covers aspects of the plan as well and clearly Councillor Satchwell is unable to be here, so part of my answer would cover maybe what she would like to say as well.

So firstly, in terms of trust of this Council, I'm pleased to say that the most recent residents survey which was conducted in June of this year, found that 81% of our residents trust this council, which is against a national benchmark of 64% of councils generally so the information that that tells us is that our council is trusted by residents and if I might be allowed to make a small political point, clearly we stood on what we were trying to do at this year's election and this administration secured all of the seats across the borough. So I'm confident that this council is trusted by residents and we are trying to do what residents would like us to do.

In terms of the planning issues that Mr Comlay raises, as all members know the planning system is not a public survey or a public opinion survey, the members of the planning committee have a very difficult task to do. It is to test the planning application against the national and the local policies in place and see how that fits with the application before them. I joined many people online watching the planning committee at the recent New Lane Pfizer site application. I thought the committee did an excellent job of testing those points where there was discrepancy perhaps or divergence some from policies and that was looked into in great detail and certainly as your cabinet lead for economic development I think it's really great news that we've got that multi-million pound investments and jobs coming to our borough.

The third point I wanted to make, in terms of regeneration we are absolutely in listening mode all the time within our regeneration work. We extend meeting invites to lots of different groups and ward councillors can help me in terms of identifying groups who would like to talk more about that and particularly those groups who feel they've got a part to play in making things happen right across the borough, and I know that many councillors have invited me to events. I'm very happy to continue to come and bring officers to listen to what members of the public have to say.

My final point would be about the balance between that discussion and delivery and the message I get when I'm out and about, and I imagine ward councillors get the same, is actually residents want to see delivery now of our regeneration aspirations and not years of discussion and we want to see that delivery and we are absolutely going to achieve that delivery and I know the leader and others have challenged us to get spades in the ground within the next year and that is our aim to do that. We are going to carry on listening and I'm very happy to work with ward councillors in order to make sure we get it as right as we possibly can.

Thank you Madam Mayor.”