QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Under Schedule 4, 13, Mr K Dolman, [address withheld] asked the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Education, Councillor S Claymore, the following question:-

"Given that the Local Plan was withdrawn following serious concerns made by the Plan Inspector David Vickary with regard to proposed changes and a lack of consultation (Letter to Mr A Roberts, Development Plan Manager from Inspector David Vickery 15th February 2013) is it not the case that as the Council works towards a new plan they are still in disarray and that decisions regarding potential housing developments are being rushed in order to include them into the Local Plan?"

Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:

When the work was being carried out on the original core strategy of the then LDF (Local development framework) the guidelines at that time allowed for a much more flexible approach to producing LDF documents, the two main documents that could be produced were a core strategy and a site allocations document. However, towards the later part of our work, changes to national planning policy came into force which at the time were not clear and relatively untested in terms of external examination by the planning inspector. The submission draft of our core strategy / local plan was passed through full council where it was agreed to submit our plan in its then current format.

During the subsequent exploratory meeting and within the letter you refer to from David Vickery, the Planning Inspector, we were informed that we should specifically allocate more housing land to meet our housing needs. Our suggested modifications to allow for these changes in policy and to address the inspectors concerns would, in his words (I am concerned that these modifications might open the local plan to legal challenge.) he also went on to state that (the local plan would be very substantially and significantly different to the plan publicly consulted upon and then submitted for examination).

At no point in his letter does he refer to any lack of consultation to date. He did suggest that the most appropriate action is for the Council to withdraw the Tamworth local plan allowing us to make the modifications and to republish it for public consultation.

A report then went to full council in March last year recommending we do exactly that and this was unanimously supported. Council also established a cross party working group to oversee the revisions to the Local plan.

Our officers set out a clear work programme of what work was needed to be done and this has been kept to.

Since May last year work has been continuing to assess the potential of housing sites, which involves a technical and sustainability appraisal of each site and these sites have been sent to some 34 separate bodies for technical
appraisal, including the Environment Agency, Staffordshire County Council, Severn Trent and Natural England.

In order to inform the long list of options for the future of the golf course and as agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on the 30th May last year, we included the golf course in the proposed sites for assessment. In order to include development within any of the subsequent options for the golf course, we had to assess the site for suitability for allocation.

So, based on all the open and transparent information that's been available since we took back the operation of the course in March last year and even under local Government timescales I don't consider 9 months to be rushing things and neither do I consider at any time that this Council was in disarray.

As far as the new local plan is concerned, we have looked at all the sites in the Borough and are only proposing allocating sites where there is a willing landowner and where any constraints can be overcome. Out of the 64 sites that were assessed we are proposing to take forward 4 Greenfield extensions and 19 Brownfield sites in the urban area. All other sites were either unsuitable having insurmountable constraints or not supported by a developer.

Following a decision by Cabinet, scheduled for the 13th March we expect the draft local plan consultation will start on the 31st March and will run for 6 weeks. At that consultation you can make your comments on specific policies or sites. The next consultation will then take place during the summer when the plan will be available for comments on its legal compliance and tests of soundness.

Following that the plan will go to full Council for approval and then be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by the Planning Inspectorate, which will allow for further testing of the plan.

**Supplementary question**

After a short discourse Mr Dolman was asked to put his supplementary question. He said that the question is: Will you give us some hope, a vision better that we fear? An assurance that the Golf Course will be excluded from sale, which will become very valuable public space?

**Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:**

Do not want urban sprawl. Will work with the residents to mitigate against the loss of the Golf Course. There will be part parkland on as much as we can and there will be houses on there. As long as I’m here you have my assurance.
"We are told the decision to close Tamworth’s Golf Course was based on a forecast on-going loss to the Council of £140,000 per year. Please can you itemise in detail the incomes and expenditures forecast to show exactly what is expected to be spent on what items and what each of the sources of income are expected to be?"

Councillor D Cook gave the following response:

Since re-opening the course in March 2013 the Council has focused on providing good quality affordable golf. This has been achieved in the most cost effective way possible. The Councils annual budget pages show clearly the budgeted expenditure by type and also the expected income. So far this year the golf Course budget has under recovered on some income targets. The overall net effect this financial year is that the course will require a net revenue subsidy of circa £100k. This is in addition to the £100k capital spent in re-opening the course. We simply do not have the required finance at present to re-open the very, very dated club house.

The budget for the next financial year shows

The total costs of running the course as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wages and Salaries</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises Related Expenses</td>
<td>Electric, water, repairs etc</td>
<td>£ 67,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies and Services</td>
<td>Golf Cart hire, Catering, Telephones etc</td>
<td>£ 31,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charges for Services</td>
<td>Refuse collection, bank charges etc</td>
<td>£ 3,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-charge for Marmion House Staff</td>
<td>ie CE, Director and accounts etc</td>
<td>£ 42,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf Course Grounds Maintenance</td>
<td>Grass cutting, vehicle insurance, S Scene wages etc</td>
<td>£ 131,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL COSTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>£ 370,380</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected income if membership is maintained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Green Fees</th>
<th>18 holes</th>
<th>£ 65,260</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Fees</td>
<td>9 holes</td>
<td>£ 80,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Fees</td>
<td>5 day Season</td>
<td>£ 26,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Fees</td>
<td>7 day Season</td>
<td>£ 35,040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catering Target | £10,690
--- | ---
Sales | £1,000
ie golf balls etc | £9,000
Buggy hire | £227,450

TOTAL projected income

So projected income is £227,450, less projected costs of £370,380 means the tax-payer will subsidise the course in 2014/15 to the tune of £142,930.

I have the full breakdown that will appear in the 2014/15 budget book here with me now, you can have it with pleasure. You were also given this year’s budget book which carries similar costs for the golf course.

I have stated there is nothing to hide, nothing will be confidential and I have stuck to this.

Cllr Cooke, I have read a few things on the Herald web-site about these costs being artificial or creative accounting, if you have concerns please raise them as this would be a crime.

**Supplementary Question:**

It was a regrettable decision to give the lease to Jack Barker Limited. Has the Council considered pursuing any legal actions against Jack Barker Limited in order to recover some of the loss?

**Councillor D Cook gave the following reply:**

Unable to chase as it’s a Limited Company that’s gone into liquidation.
"You will be aware of the recent Council decision to close Tamworth Golf Course. In the event of your group gaining control of Tamworth Council in the May elections what would be your plans for the Golf Course. Would your group alter that decision in any way, perhaps to keep it open as a golf course or other public open space recreational amenity? Or would you, as with the Conservative group, want to sell it on to the highest bidder?"

Councillor J Faulkner gave the following reply:

In 2005, the Conservative administration of Tamworth Borough Council brought forward proposals to offload the Borough’s heritage and leisure facilities including Tamworth Castle, the Assembly Rooms, the Peaks Leisure Centre and Tamworth Golf Course. At the time lavish statements were made regarding the benefits of these proposals.

As regards the Golf Course, the then cabinet member for regeneration and community, told the Tamworth Herald:

“What we’re looking to do is enter into a partnership for the golf course, I think we will retain ownership of the land but we’ll be looking for an external management partner to come in with some investment, to put money into increasing the facilities available at the venue – like perhaps a nice restaurant, perhaps a gymnasium or even a pool. We have this vision for the golf course and we want to bring it back up to being an attractive golfing venue.”

In 2007, a 50 year lease was signed for the Golf Course and Ron Maydon, managing director of the Jack Barker Group said:

“We are very pleased to finally add Tamworth Golf Centre to the group. We tried to acquire it four years ago so we are delighted finally to be successful.

“Tamworth fits perfectly geographically between other existing Jack Barker sites in Northampton and Staffordshire.

“We will shortly be submitting planning applications for a new two-tier driving range, restaurant and golf store.”

However, it soon became evident that the business model was dependent upon the dumping of large volumes of rubble on the site thus evading the landfill tax. Despite this an Amington Conservative councillor on the Planning Committee was quoted as saying:

“The end result really will be one of the best and most impressive local authority courses in the country.”
I leave it to you to judge whether that has happened.

As regards the present view of the Labour Group, we oppose the sale of the golf course for developments other than leisure.

**Supplementary Question:**

Can you assure me that any decision your group comes to will be consistent with the wider interests of the whole community and not just the interest of commerciality?

**Councillor J Faulkner gave the following response:**

Can safely give you that assurance.
"Can you enlighten me on Tamworth Council's position on protecting open spaces, as we seem to be intent on selling land where we can and destroying anything green, does the leader of the Council deem more houses more important than protecting bio diversity in Tamworth?"

Councillor D Cook gave the following reply:

The Borough Council has two roles in open space.

**The first is as a provider of open space.**

The borough’s green spaces vary greatly in size and type, including formal urban parks and informal amenity grassland, allotments, cemeteries, sport pitches, floodplain and grazing marshes, designated wetland areas, and linear green and blue elements, such as Public Rights of Way, cycling routes, roadside verges and rail corridors, rivers and canals and their verges. We provide access to a large number of these.

We are certainly not intent on destroying anything green – in fact we have recently acquired more land to manage as open space (Broad Meadow)

We must recognise that we have increasing need to provide homes and jobs for Tamworth residents and for their children in the future. I have 2 kids, others have 3 or 4. Where do we expect this generation to live in 15 years if we do not provide homes? This generation will need access to good quality open space and that is what I want to focus on, it is not just about quantity.

But in the face of increasing central government budget cuts we need to ensure we use the resources we have in the most efficient and effective way. It’s a large balancing act, and we try to get it as right as possible.

**The second role is as planning authority.**

We have designated a network of open spaces through our current Local Plan and have policies to protect these (the policy does allow their loss when certain criteria are met as per national law).

The current Local Plan also sets a standard for the provision of new open space on new developments.

We must also remember that the fight against for loss of green space and bio-diversity is a worthy goal, but Tamworth is utterly surrounded on all sides by green space, we must not just think in terms of political boundaries.

**Supplementary Question:**
In public meeting if people want to visit countryside can leave Tamworth and go to North Warwickshire. When Council sells land for development this leads to outline planning application and then application goes to the Planning Committee. How can fairness and a sound decision be made when the vice-chair is also the portfolio holder, surely this overrides the democratic process?

**Councillor D Cook gave the following reply:**

Every member of the Planning Committee will consider the merits of the application and make a decision. Councillor Claymore will do his duty. Sound decision and sound professional judgement. He does not behave that way and he will look at all matters and deliver a decision in the best possible way.
"Could you quantify and provide a full breakdown of figures to support your statement, which you made recently on local radio, that the Tamworth Council were in receipt of £1,000,000 from Jack Barker during the time they ran the Tamworth Golf Course?"

Councillor D Cook gave the following reply:

Mr Stokes, the point I was making is that in the 5 years Jack Barker / Tamworth Golf centre ran the course the tax-payer in Tamworth benefited by over £1million.

The course operations cost £212,585 in 3 years between 2004/2007 as per the out-turns that every single Councillor of every single party have agreed when all voted every year for the statement of Accounts. If we assumed this loss would not have worsened, even though I suspect it would, that’s an average loss of £71,000 per year. Over the 5 years from 2002/2007 this equates to £412,848, however, these figures are for the Golf Course operations only – they exclude the cost of Grounds Maintenance of the course as, from 2003/04, the management & costs of Grounds Maintenance for the Golf Course was transferred to Public Spaces (& no longer shown separately). The annual cost of £135,910 was identified during 2006/07 as part of the Leisure Futures review - and approved by Council on 26 February 2007 as a saving as part of the transfer of the Golf Course to Tamworth Golf Centre. Once this is added in the average deficit is £207k p.a. which means over 5 years the deficit is in excess of £1m (£1.090m from 2002/03 to 2006/07).

The Council also received rents between 2007 and 2012 totalling £289,944 which also need to be taken into account.

There was also the £150,000 the Council believed in 2006 that was required in Capital works on the drainage needed, certainly on the first fairway. Jack Barkers resolved this.

If we then include further pension contributions to staff that the Council has not had to budget for, then we are well in excess of £1million Mr Stokes.

Supplementary Question:

The figures are made up and not realistic at all. Initial rent of £50,000 increased up to £10,000 each year. Jack Barker was incapable of paying the rent and in fact did not pay it. In March 2013 renegotiated to reduce rent to £16,000. Is that good business?
Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:

I have a breakdown here to clarify the rent Jack Barker paid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budget (rent due lease)</th>
<th>Rent received</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007/8</td>
<td>£ 50,283.02</td>
<td>£ 50,283.02</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/9</td>
<td>£ 60,000.00</td>
<td>£ 60,000.00</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>£ 70,000.00</td>
<td>£ 69,999.96</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>£ 75,000.00</td>
<td>£ 75,833.33</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>£ 85,000.00</td>
<td>£ 33,827.35</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Mr Bird was not in the Chamber due to the number of public in attendance the question was read out by Councillor Claymore.

Under Schedule 4, 13, Mr K Bird, [address withheld] asked the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Education, Councillor S Claymore, the following question:-

"Why was there no consultation with the local residents over the closure of the golf course by the councilors?"

Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:

The golf course has been a very public topic of conversation since 2005 when we first began the process of leasing out the golf course. Since then there has been a very open and transparent process of reporting to Cabinet and to the public via various media channels. In March 2013 the Cabinet decided to re-open the course for a maximum of two years rather than close the course at that point. At the same time a project was begun to review the future options including golf provision through various means but also disposal for re-development. As part of this project the Council undertook specific consultation with customers and residents. The consultation did include a proportion of residents from the local area. This process provided the Council with a clear steer from customers and residents showing that they preferred options that did not involve redevelopment. However as reported to Cabinet on the 23rd January 2014 the financial and wider strategic issues outweighed the public view and the Council selected to close the course in March 2015 and to move forward a project to dispose of the land for re-development.
As Mrs Bird was not in the Chamber due to the number of public in attendance the question was read out by Councillor Claymore

Under Schedule 4, 13, Mrs C Bird, [address withheld] asked the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Education, Councillor S Claymore, the following question:-

"Have you looked at other options regarding the running of the golf course by other leisure companies?"

Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:

Yes the Council undertook a long process to review its options in relation to the Golf Course and this was reported many times in the local press, and to Cabinet and Scrutiny.

The options appraisal looked at a range of options to sustain golf but concluded that retaining the golf course even under an external leisure company was not feasible.

The Council has previously leased the course to a private company but the Company failed and went into liquidation
Under Procedure Rule No 10, Mr S Patrick, [address withheld] will ask the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Education, Councillor S Claymore, the following question:-

"Can the councillor please explain how council are are in position to allocate the golf course site within the Local plan only 4 weeks after the decision to close the course and the draft redevelopment project plan only becoming available on 13th February 2014. When have the necessary local plan assessments taken place?"

Councillor S Claymore gave the following response:

Work on the Local Plan which is intended to be considered by Cabinet in March has been ongoing for several years. More specifically since May last year work has been continuing to assess the potential of sites throughout the Borough for housing, which involves a technical and sustainability appraisal of each site and these sites have been sent to some 34 separate bodies for technical appraisal, including the Environment agency, Staffordshire County Council, the coal authority, Severn Trent and Natural England. Over 60 sites were assessed throughout the Borough.

In order to inform the long list of options for the future of the golf course and as agreed by cabinet at its meeting on the 30th May last year, we included the golf course in the proposed sites for assessments. In order to include development within any of the subsequent options for the golf course, we had to assess the site for suitability for allocation.

It is considered that the site is suitable and now the Cabinet have taken the decision to close the course, the site could be included in the draft Local plan for further public consultation.

Therefore the assessments that have been informed the options appraisal and now the Local Plan have been taking place since May 2013.

For info:

Following a decision by cabinet scheduled for the 13th of March, we expect the draft local plan consultation will start on the 31st March and will run for 6 weeks. At that consultation you can make your comments on specific policies or sites. The next consultation will then take place during the summer when the plan will be available for comments on its legal compliance and tests of soundness.

Following that the plan will go to full council for approval and then be submitted to the SOS for examination by the planning inspectorate which will allow for further testing of the plan.
Supplementary Question:

If Cabinet based decision on misleading and inaccurate information would they review the decision again?

Councillor S Claymore gave the following reply:

Yes of course.