

List of Public Questions for 21 March Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee

Question 1: Public Art - Agenda Item 9 - Michael Goodheart

Cam Valley Forum understand that £480,000 of the £550,000 that was allocated for the 'River Themed Public Art Programme', in 2016, remains unspent. We request to be involved in consultations on how this public money might be used, and ask that this is not delayed.

It was thought that it might fund a sequel to the highly acclaimed film 'Pure Clean Water' about Chalk streams. It might tap into the rich local musical talent to sponsor the commissioning and performing of musical compositions inspired by the Cam. It could fund a project by Rowan, who produce outstanding works of art, working with adults with learning disabilities, such as the recently completed mural to celebrate Cherry Hinton Brook. It could fund outreach into schools' art departments, and it could heighten awareness of the beauty of the Cam and the need to nurture our river.

Perhaps it could fund a sculpture that would appeal to locals and visitors alike. Many cities and towns have commissioned such works of art to enrich areas of high footfall by being relevant to the specific history of the place. Might there a life-size sculpture depicting the laundresses at work on Launderess Green, or a sculpture to celebrate the many years of river swimming at Sheep's Green?

Such sculptures should be well affordable within the allocated funds. We note that in 2019 the London Borough of Waltham Forest commissioned a statue of their local footballer, Harry Kane, which cost just £7,200.

We urge that the money available should be put to good use bringing lasting benefit and joy to people who love Cambridge and its river. It might even have the potential to reverse the tide of defeatism and depression that seems to be engulfing our city?

We look forward to hearing how Cam Valley Forum might be able to assist in steering this arts programme forward.

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Question 2: Public Art - Agenda Item 9 - Nicky Shepard (CEO, Abbey People)

Abbey People feels that the decision making on the S106 Public Art allocations has been patently unfair, and in breach of the spirit and structure of the Community Wealth Building Strategy.

The decision to fund two centrally decided projects (More Playful Art Please and Urban Voices) instead of community generated projects is in breach of the council's Community Wealth Building policy. These projects are centrally run by officers and have been developed by central officers rather than community groups. Using any area allocation for a central project should only be a last resort if funding is in danger of expiring. As there were a number of local projects that could have been developed, we feel strongly that any Abbey S106 art allocation should be allocated to one of the local community lead projects, rather than central projects. To decide otherwise is in breach of the spirit and letter of the Community Wealth Building strategy.

We feel the decisions and allocation was patently unfair, paragraph of the report 1.2 b states:

b. Although a grant application from Romsey ward did not fully meet the selection criteria, it has provided a starting point for developing an enhanced project at Romsey Recreation Ground as part of the Commissioning Programme. This would engage local residents about what that local green space means to them and community life.

As the report has stated that the application did not meet selection criteria but has been taken forward for commissioning, this opportunity should have been offered to all the unsuccessful applicants before any local S106 Art allocation was applied to centrally decided and run projects.

We ask that Councillors reject the report's recommendations and ask officers to review the applications with a new panel, giving all applicants that did not meet selection criteria the opportunity to develop an enhanced project as part of the Commissioning Programme. This work should be completed before any centrally-originated projects are taken forward.

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Question 3: Outdoor Play Spaces Investment Strategy - Agenda Item 12 - Miranda Gill (Chair of the Friends of Sheep's Green and Lammas Land)

I ask the following question as Chair of the Friends of Sheep's Green and Lammas Land. A quarter of children are obese when they leave primary school, and the projected cost of childhood obesity for the NHS has recently been estimated at £8 billion. We are concerned to learn about the proposal (in the Outdoor Play Spaces Investment Strategy document) to rank playgrounds into tiers, with a view to closing lower tiers and concentrating resources in large play spaces. Having an easily accessible local playground may be the only feasible opportunity for exercise for many children. Larger playgrounds will also become less attractive to children if they become overcrowded. A stated aim of the project is 'Ensuring that the play space provision aligns with the local community's needs' (4.1(b)). Please can you explain, then, why no consultation with the city's playground users on their needs has been undertaken? We would also like to know more about the proposal to resurface the playgrounds with 'versatile, year-round surfaces'. There is growing scientific concern about the toxic off-gassing of surfaces made from rubber crumb, i.e. recycled tyres. Surfaces made of rubber crumb have been found to contain significant levels of carcinogens and neurotoxins, including lead and other heavy metals. These pose major health risks, especially to children and pregnant women. Rubber crumb is increasingly banned in US playgrounds on health grounds. Please can you confirm that rubber crumb will not be used in the renovation of Cambridge playgrounds, and that the toxicity profile of all potential surfaces will be carefully reviewed?

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Question 4: Biodiversity-Traveller Sites - Mahoney Goodman

When the issue of the lack of Traveller sites in Cambridge was raised by a public question last month, this Council responded:

“Once we have received the final report from the [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment], which should be ready around springtime, we can understand the need for both permanent and temporary stopping sites in the Greater Cambridge area and where it would be best to locate a site if a need is demonstrated.” ^[1]

But the ‘biodiversity proposals’ for Arbury Town Park — from which Travellers have been evicted on several occasions in recent years — demonstrate that this Council understands full well the urgent need for temporary stopping sites in Cambridge. With wire fencing, bollards and soil bunds blocking all possible unauthorised vehicle access, these plans are transparently contrived to block Travellers from staying on the green space. ^[2]

It is all well and good to say that the local community is inconvenienced when Travellers are forced to park their vehicles in Arbury Town Park in order to, for example, visit family or attend a funeral. But unauthorised encampments will continue in Cambridge for as long as Travellers are not provided with legal stopping places. No amount of evictions and hostile architecture will change that. As this Council stated in its July 2021 ‘Motion on [the] Policing Bill’: “No family willingly stops somewhere they are not welcome”. ^[3]

Due to the long-standing policy failings of Cambridge’s local authorities, Travellers simply have no option but to stop without authorisation. It is egregious that this Council is finding new ways to punish them for this, all the while the GTANA report continues to face delay after delay.

What progress, if any, has this Council made towards finding possible locations and funding sources for temporary stopping site provision in Cambridge, and towards providing negotiated stopping agreements in the interim? Why does this Council appear to be moving faster to forcibly exclude Travellers from Cambridge than to accommodate them?

Citations:

1. <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/b18074/Information%20Pack%20-%20contains%20supplementary%20information%20for%20the%20Council%20meeting%20taking%20place%2015%20Februa.pdf?T=9>
2. <https://engage.cambridge.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/improving-biodiversity-in-arbury-town-park>
3. <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=27720>

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Question 5: S106 Funding Round - Streets and Open Spaces - Agenda Item 11 - Dani Redhead (Chair of the Friends of Sheep's Green Learner Pool)

This question is submitted on behalf of the Friends of Sheep's Green Learner Pool and relates to Item 11 on the Agenda.

S106 contributions are paid by developers to mitigate the impact of development on communities. Why, therefore is it recommended that the largest contribution of this year's generic S106 2023/24 sports and community facilities funding (£40,000) be allocated to a Private Limited Company for the purpose of building a large extension for storing members' canoes, which will involve *developing* public Common Land that will deprive the public of access to land that has been in their use for over 1,000 years?

The Cambridge Canoe Club has many supporters, but this is a commercial enterprise unavailable to general members of the public. People cannot turn up at the Club and just take out a canoe, and becoming a member costs money and involves undertaking training that is frequently oversubscribed.

Furthermore, planning permission has not yet been granted. The application is contentious because it does not comply with the requirements outlined by the Secretary of State regarding changes to Common Land and it may not actually be granted permission. This raises two concerns. First, on Page 11 of today's meeting papers, it says that "At 18/01/24 Committee Members agreed to delay grant funding for Canoe Club until planning permission was received." This risks putting undue pressure on the Planning Committee to approve the application. Secondly, there is a concern that, even if planning were to be granted, the project may not be completed within the allotted time frame,

depriving the public of money that could fund more timely improvements to other City facilities.

Cambridge City Council is committed to Equality and Diversity, and yet proposing to fund development on Common Land in this way discriminates directly against low-income groups and the children and young people that depend on free access to Common Land for their recreation. Funding per play park in Cambridge is at a shockingly low c. £1,602 *per annum* (see Item 12) making the decision to award £40,000 to a Private Limited Company baffling.

The Friends of Sheep's Green Learner Pool have repeatedly asked the Council to reinstate the heating of the Learner Pool, something that was in operation when the pool was first built in the 1970s. The Learner Pool is the only facility in the city where children can learn to swim for free. It is a vital resource that saves lives and it deserves investment. The Friends of the Learner Pool were told we were not eligible to apply for S106 funding, and yet the Learner Pool is exactly the sort of facility that should be deserving of developer funding. It is free. It benefits the most disadvantaged in our society, especially children who come every year from the most deprived areas of the City. It is hugely popular on hot days and local schools have told us that they would use it for swimming lessons if the water was heated.

We therefore ask the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces and City Services why he is recommending funding a Private company rather than using developer contributions for the genuine benefit of the City, for example, by properly maintaining and heating the Learner Pool – a facility that would benefit countless children into the future?

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Question 6: Herbicide Reduction Plan - Agenda Item 13 - Pesticide Free Cambridge

We are delighted with the progress of the Herbicide Reduction Plan as discussed at recent meetings of the Herbicide Reduction Working Group on which we sit, and as outlined in the latest Report (<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/s65481/Final> of Herbicide Use Reduction Plan with Appendices and EQIA 060324.pdf). We look forward to further collaboration with Cambridge City Council now that the purchase of a range of new equipment has been approved which will allow for the rollout of herbicide-free weed control across the

city. We are especially keen that our combined public communications plan is pursued urgently given the misleading media coverage over Cambridgeshire County Council's disappointing reversal of its earlier decision to stop using herbicides on its Highways. It is important that residents are aware of the interrelated ecological, public health, and disability rights justifications for the City Council's Herbicide Reduction Plan, to encourage both ongoing public support, as well as a wider shift away from herbicides and insecticides on privately owned land.

As agreed on at recent Working Group Meetings, can the Report please be amended to include reference to two current initiatives that depend, and build on the success of the HPR? i) our Pesticide-Free Schools (<https://www.pesticidefreecambridge.org/schools-campaign>), backed by Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire county Council, and the combined authority Mayor. ii) Pesticide-Free Cambridge Colleges, a collaboration between ourselves and Cambridge Climate Society (<https://www.pesticidefreecambridge.org/colleges-campaign>).

Finally, the disability access element of pavement plants is mentioned four times in the Report, under 3.4a, 4c, 10b, and again in the EQIA (9), where weeds are also presented as potentially hazardous to parents with buggies and prams. We feel it is vital to include reference to pesticide exposure itself, even at very low doses, as not only a public health and biodiversity issue, but also a disability access one which impacts disproportionately on people with certain chronic illnesses and allergies/hypersensitivities to active ingredients. It is also a concern for parents of babies and young children whose growing nervous system makes them especially vulnerable to the toxic effects of synthetic pesticides. Can these points be added to the EQI please?

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**Question 7: Cambridge Market Status and Powers - Agenda Item 7
– John Preston**

The Council's support (or lack of it) for market traders, including the role of the market in providing sustainable food.

The Chair has ruled this draft question out of time due to the high number of other public speakers who have registered. If question details are finalised a response can be sent after committee.

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Question 8: Cultural Strategy - Agenda Item 8 – John Preston

The Cultural Strategy's support (or lack of it) for individual artists, musicians and performers, and the provision of facilities essential to enable their cultural activities.

The Chair has ruled this draft question out of time due to the high number of other public speakers who have registered. If question details are finalised a response can be sent after committee.