

## COUNCIL MEETING – 23 JULY 2019

### QUESTIONS FROM ELECTOR UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 9

#### **1. From Lee Pettman to Councillor Swindlehurst**

“In July 2018 Cllr. Swindlehurst announced that the administration were in talks with China about plans to bring a university campus back to the town. Does he have an update on where progress with these plans might be?”

#### Reply

Thank you for your question –

The Council was never in talks with China about bringing a Chinese University to Slough. What I had referred to were preliminary discussions as whether we could provide a supported accommodation offer for Chinese students attending higher education facilities in London – ultimately we decided that this wasn't right for Slough.

We have recently met with Brunel University and discussed strengthening partnership arrangements with them. As a result of these meetings we are likely to have additional have student placements from Brunel in our health facilities and further volunteering/placement opportunities for their students across Slough.

Following on from my Party's 2018 local election manifesto pledge “to work to bring a higher education facility back to Slough” the Council's Chief Executive and I over the past few months have been leading discussions with Royal Holloway University, University of London about the potential re-location of their business school and a student study centre to Slough.

These discussions have been positive and, subject to securing some external funding, we could see a much greater presence from the University within Slough. We also hope to be able to work closely on our joint objectives for inclusive learning, economic development and business engagement.

#### **2. From Charlie Olsen to Councillor Swindlehurst**

“Only last month, June 2019, one of your own Cllrs said, at a scrutiny meeting, that there would be no more updates on the regeneration of the High Street until at least October 2019 if not later. Can Cllr. Swindlehurst confirm what progress is being made on the regeneration plans having failed to deliver the ‘big news’ Cllr. Carter promised us, nearly 12 months ago, to arrive by the end of last year?”

## Reply

You are correct the big announcement didn't happen toward the end of last year, it happened in March when British Land announced that they had been appointed by AIDA to lead a £1 billion regeneration scheme transforming Slough's town centre.

Its timing in the run up to the local election meant the Council was restricted by purdah rules, and did not add to British Land's own announcements with further publicity.

British Land has an office, retail and leisure property portfolio worth £12.8 billion and are one of the largest property development and investment companies in the UK.

They are specialist town centre developers who create and manage places that reflect the changing needs of the people who work, visit, or live in and around them.

If you wish to see example of their portfolio or development I suggest you examine projects like 4 Kingdom Street in Paddington, Surrey Quays shopping centre in Canada Water and 122 Leadenhall Street.

I met with British Land in March and they have had two subsequent meetings with officers over the past 2 months. We are now entering a phase where our meetings will intensify as we look to bring forward a proposed masterplan of what we can expect Slough's town centre to look like, within the next 8-10 weeks.

Our officers and British Land are working collaboratively to deliver a transformational masterplan for Slough – which includes our transport vision – which they hope will achieve planning permission in the shortest possible time.

Richard Wise, the Head of Residential Development at British Land has advised me that British Land have recently completed an exercise looking at what will drive the greatest success in Slough. They are delighted the Council has taken the strategic decision to take control of the former TVU site. They see this as making a significant contribution to their plans for a holistic new town centre joining up the station and its adjacent sites, Queensmere, Observatory and TVU all physically connect to provide a safe and highly attractive pedestrianised area, where people can work, relax, eat and shop.

I'd like to thank British Land for their confidence in the ability of our town to succeed and their openness and willingness to collaborate with the Council's leadership on their plans and I look forward to continuing on this journey with them to deliver a new town centre for our residents.

The update is being brought to scrutiny in October as this is the end of the intensive period of work we are undertaking with British Land to produce an initial sketch masterplan for the new town centre.

### **3. From Neel Rana to Councillor Hussain**

“There have been a succession of issues with the performance of third-party providers contracted out to provide services on behalf of the council for many years, not least Interserve and Arvato. What measures does the administration have in place to improve procurement and contract management going forward to avoid further performance issues and cost to the taxpayer?”

#### Reply

Thank You for your question.

The Council have recently been through a process of re-procuring their major contracts or, in some instances, bringing the relevant services back “in house” as the terms of those contracts came to an end. In the case of the Arvato contract the Council served notice on Arvato on 14 February this year terminating the contract early and will be bringing the services provided under their contract back in house on 1 November.

Most of these major contracts, such as the Interserve Contract for example, were procured nearly seventeen years ago and the Key Performance Indicators incorporated into those contracts had become increasingly ineffective as these contracts neared their end and, of course, the management of those contracts was subject to changes of personnel within the Council and at the contractors over the years and performance under the contracts was not ideal to meet the changed circumstances in which the Council was operating as these contracts were coming to the end of their terms.

Things have, however, now moved on. These contracts have now been re-procured with robust provisions to enable much more rigorous contract management and effective monitoring of Key Performance Indicators and sanctions for poor performance. Recommendations by internal auditors in this area of procurement are being implemented. The Council have just modernised and updated their contract procedure rules which are in the process of being adopted by the Council and work has begun to review and update the Council's Procurement Strategy and Procurement Operating Procedures. Consultants are presently working at the Council to assist with these items and also to help the Council with plans for building up a new procurement team following recent departures from the Council. The Council now also have in place two senior and experienced interim procurement specialists to ensure that effective value for money procurement is ongoing in the meanwhile.

The Council have also agreed to the setting up of a new sub-committee of Cabinet to have dedicated oversight of the Council's plans to drive forward a commercial ethos across all of the Council's activities. The Director for Finance and Resources is now leading a group which has commenced work on developing a commercialisation agenda for the Council and commercialisation is also a major part of the Council's drive for transformation which is being directed by the Chief Executive. The Council's Service Lead for Commissioning and Transformation with assistance from the Council's Project Management

Office is undertaking a review of procurement and commissioning activities across the Council which will take into account best practice elsewhere. These major new workstreams have as part of their remit to recommend methods of robust contract management to be adopted across the Council.

#### **4. From Jeremy Owen to Councillor Swindlehurst**

Does Slough Urban renewal(SUR) keep planning to work with Lovell Homes on future projects given the level of dissatisfaction with buyers of the new homes on Wexham Green?

##### Reply

Thank you for your question. I was sorry to learn that the property you purchased at Wexham Green has had a higher than expected number of 'snags' but am relieved to have learnt that all but one of these has been rectified and the last issue is in the process of being rectified.

The overall feedback from purchasers at Wexham Green has been largely positive and SUR have shared with SBC feedback from surveys homeowners who completed on properties between February and June of this year. Some of these comments are:

"The specification of the ground floor is very spacious and well designed. There is natural light coming into the entire house."

"This development is not too big or small and the homes looked radically different in a good way in the design. The property was bespoke so it really appealed to us. It was marketed very well and very differently and I thought it was aesthetically a very pleasing way to put together a development."

"We've come from a two bedroom, two bathroom apartment, to our first house with a two and a four year old, and it's magic. We love everything. I was really impressed with how many rooms they were able to put a window in. It's a simple thing, but in contemporary builds is often really poor."

Lovell Homes are part of the Morgan Sindall family of companies and it is likely that SUR will use them again in some of our housing developments. For our larger developments such as the Canal Basin or the former TVU site, SUR will be using another Morgan Sindall companies, particularly MUSE, who are specialists in high quality, higher density urban regeneration.

One of the key selling points of SUR is the opportunity it has given SBC to work with various Morgan Sindall companies dependent on the scope and need of each individual project

I raised your question regarding SUR use of Lovell Homes with the Development Technical Manager and Managing Director at SUR and he has informed me that SUR would be happy to work with Lovell again.