

## **Ashover Parish Council questions for Cllr Nigel Barker, Leader North East Derbyshire District Council**

Following his appointment as Leader of North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC) last year, Nigel Barker offered to join council meetings in the district to answer any questions councillors had. Ashover Parish Council was invited to take part in the initiative and as part of the process, was invited to submit questions ahead of a meeting so Nigel had an opportunity to include input from colleagues in his response.

Unfortunately, the scheduled meeting had to be cancelled. However, we were keen to see responses to the questions as the issues are very much topical for our community. Also, these answers could form an agenda for a re-scheduled visit.

The Questions & Answers are set out below where APC = Ashover Parish Council and NB = Nigel Barker.

Inevitably, some of Nigel's responses raise more questions and we're hoping to have an opportunity to follow up on these at a future meeting.

### **Planning**

#### **Question 1**

APC: What planning policy will apply to future housing development to ensure sustainability i.e. ratio of residents to Doctors' Surgeries, Schools etc., as demand for these services grows and residential numbers increase?

NB: I have had a long reply to this question from officers, which is quite technical but to summarise whenever an application is approved contributions are requested for extra doctors surgeries, school places etc.

#### **Question 2**

APC: Will the planners, when considering applications, look at other approved applications which have not yet started, to consider the effect on the infrastructure?

NB: The cumulative impact of committed development in a settlement is a material consideration regarding infrastructure capacity.

#### **Question 3**

APC: Given what seems to be recognised as inadequate sewage processing infrastructure in Ashover, what steps will NEDDC's Planning Department be taking to ensure any future planning applications for housing are more rigorously assessed by Severn Trent?

NB: We will review our working relationship with all consultees as part of the evidence gathering process and flooding (linked to the issue of combined sewer capacity) is an area in which we will be seeking consultation responses from Parish Councils, as we recognise that this is a significant area of concern for residents.

#### **Question 4**

APC: Are there any plans for Social Housing in Ashover?

NB: We have commissioned a strategic housing needs assessment which will have an updated evidence base to inform on social/affordable delivery. In addition we have begun the work on the next housing strategy which will have a focus on housing delivery in all areas of the district. The Council has no funded plans to build social housing in Ashover. We do, where opportunity arises, buy back former council

homes across the district and there have been a number of these in recent years in Ashover.

#### Question 5

APC: Is there any truth in the rumour that only three people will be allowed to speak on any one planning application, and only then so long as they don't repeat what's been said before?

NB: This is not entirely true, 3 people may speak for the application and 3 against, plus the local member etc. All is subject to a Chairs discretion to increase the number of speakers if there is a justification for it. This is in addition to the right to respond in writing to consultation on any planning application.

### **Budgetary Issues**

#### Question 1

APC: We have been invited to a Parish and Town Councillor forum at NEDDC and the invites intimate that there is a new council chamber, is this correct and if so how can the cost be justified when we have a cost of living crisis?

NB: This improvement to the Council Chamber has been in the planning stage for quite a while and the impact of COVID physical distancing and accessibility issues brought this to a head. Proving the existing set up was not fit for purpose. There is a budget set aside to upgrade and maintain the building therefore the cost of the improvements were met from that budget.

#### Question 2

APC: What are the plans for the old Council Offices on Saltergate? Are we still paying rates and paying for the ongoing maintenance of the building?

NB: The Council sold this property several years ago and hasn't got any liabilities from it.

### **Climate Change**

APC: NEDDC's David Thompson and Helen Fairfax are working with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) in response to the biodiversity obligations which come into force in January 2024. What strategy is being put in place for co-ordination with parish councils so we avoid duplication of effort with DWT?

NB: Officers will be reviewing how best to approach this once we know the position regarding the degree of existing relationships between DWT and all Parish and Town Councils across the District. We will be contacting Parish Councils about the steps later in the year and the subsequent conversations do need to involve DWT and DCC as we fully agree that our approach to biodiversity across the District needs to be one that is co-ordinated, clear and avoiding duplication.

### **General**

APC: Will all parties work together to improve the future of North East Derbyshire irrespective of political views?

NB: I would hope so, we have tried to be as inclusive as possible as a new administration.