

Questions by Members of the Council under Procedure Rule 10.0

Council – 19 July 2022

Questions from Councillor Bell Received on 14 July 2022

Question:

Can I be provided with the figures for Consultants used by the Council over the last 2 years and up to the present time?

Answer:

Watford Borough Council	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
Investment Properties & Valuation	415,870	512,685		The Property & Investment consultancy costs largely relate to the costs in overseeing our substantial and successful property portfolio, which supports council services. Our property portfolio is managed by external agents through a tendered contract. Other fees relate to undertaking transactions where we procure professional advice. As a council we have a duty to undertake valuations of our invested property and operational assets.
Infrastructure	25,044	23,151		Interim capacity prior to the recruitment of permanent personal.
Communications	34,575			Consultants used as part of funding from the government under the Welcome Back Fund to support the promotion of the town centre and to cover maternity leave.

Revenues and Benefits (New Burdens Funded)	52,245	82,594		Support for payment of Covid Grants, including systems work, funded by new burdens grants.
Waste & Recycling Review	49,737			Specialist technical support to implement garden waste service change
Environmental Protection	27,583			Specialist technical support to deliver on specialised environmental protection duties
Digital Improvements	29,600	27,200		Consultants used as part of funding from the government under the Welcome Back Fund to support the promotion of the town centre and to cover maternity leave.
CCTV		27,343		Specialist accredited consultants to support the review the CCTV service, delivering service improvements.
Building Control		48,232		Interim capacity prior to the recruitment of permanent personal.
Economic Development		25,000		Specialist Economic Development consultancy costs to review Watford's sector strengths and assist in the development of the Economic Development Strategy.
Colosseum		22,250		Specialist technical support for the re-tender of the Colosseum operator contract
Other (Service areas spending less than £20k)	73,498	58,549		
Total	708,152	827,003	73,153	

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Question:

How long has the development at woodside been put on hold for and is it likely to be scaled back from the original proposals a few years back?"

Answer:

1. We remain committed to investing in significant improvements in facilities at Woodside and are continuing to work closely with the community on these plans. A range of options are being developed for Woodside and associated business cases to ensure the scheme is affordable to the Council and the community groups that provide valuable activities to our community and so it meets community need. This will be discussed by cabinet in Autumn 2022. This has caused a programme delay but the project is not on hold. The scope and scale for the project will be firmed up and agreed as part of the work to develop options.

Ward Councillors and the portfolio holder met with stakeholders on site on 21st June 2022 to discuss the project.

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Question:

Are there any plans to review the grasscutting and shrubbery in Cassiobury park and other parks which have been left to 'grow wild'?

Answer:

As part of green flag monitoring and inspection visits we review, adapt and identify new opportunities to introduce wild areas, tree planting or improve amenity planting. Having wild and semi natural areas is essential to addressing the biodiversity crisis and climate adaptation as such areas create lower temperatures and valuable habitat, and greater level of biomass to absorb carbon.

Such areas create habitat connectivity and space for wildlife to move and support essential life support services for us as people such as clean air, water, and pollination for example.

It is important that we are not just led by aesthetics but support nature recovery in managing our estate. It is also an important assessment criteria in the green flag judging process

Supporting facts below

The UK is one of the most biodiversity depleted nations in the world with on average about half of its biodiversity left and consistently ranking in the bottom 10% of the world for 'biodiversity intactness'¹. This is more profound in South East England than in the more remote parts of the UK. Biodiversity loss poses a significant threat to life as it provides us with clean air, water, food, fuel and fibre and optimal living conditions. It is a complex matter affected by many things such as agriculture, development, pollution, climate change, fragmentation of habitat, and large declines in insect biomass (the volume/abundance of insects).

The latest (2019) UK State of Nature report found that the abundance and distribution of the UK's species has, on average, declined since 1970 and that this decline has continued in the last decade, despite conservation efforts.

There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature over the last decade in the UK. Where there were sufficient data to analyse, it was reported that there has been a 13% decline in average species abundance and a 5% decline in average species distribution. 15% of species were found to be currently threatened with extinction from the UK and 2% have already gone extinct since 1970ⁱⁱ. This pattern continues with alarming declines in bird numbers and more species moving on to the endangered red listⁱⁱⁱ.

In the last 50 years, 76 species (1% of those assessed) became extinct in Hertfordshire; more than three species every two years. Of these, 35 were invertebrates, 26 were plants, 13 were vertebrates and 2 were lichens. 1,446 species (19% of those assessed) are currently threatened with extinction in Hertfordshire. This includes over 1,000 invertebrates and 260 plants. The remaining 80% are classed at lower risk of extinction. The UK is home to 85% of the world's chalk rivers, a unique habitat, two of which run through Watford, the River Colne and River Gade both of which are in 'moderate' condition as assessed under the water framework directive^{iv}.

To see biodiversity loss halted, in a Watford Borough Council context, it requires effective policy and strategy to deliver spatial planning, protection, land management, education and addressing other adverse impacts that will enable biodiversity to recover.

ⁱ [Biodiversity indicators | Natural History Museum \(nhm.ac.uk\)](https://www.nhm.ac.uk)

ⁱⁱ [State of Nature 2019 - National Biodiversity Network \(nbn.org.uk\)](https://www.nbn.org.uk)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Birds of Conservation Concern | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](https://www.bto.org.uk)

^{iv} [Hertfordshire's State of Nature Report 2020_0.pdf \(hertswildlifetrust.org.uk\)](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)