

## **Mayor's Public Question Time – 10 December 2014**

Venue: UWE Glenside campus, Fishponds

### **Summary of questions / issues raised and the Mayor's responses:**

- 1. Public transport** – question from Angela Athay-Hunt:  
Bristol, historically, has been poorly served in terms of public transport. It is impossible to travel from east to west using one service (for example). There is no option for people living on the outskirts of the city to travel other than driving our cars – what sustainable solutions (other than moving to BS1 or BS3) are there?

#### **Summary of Mayor's response:**

- The origins of Bristol's transport issues stem from the deregulation carried out during the 1980s. The Council has no direct control over bus services.
- Very significant investment is being made in conjunction with neighbouring authorities, e.g. in MetroBus, utilising funding awarded by the Department for Transport.
- Bus use has risen by approx. 10%, but we need more commuters to leave their cars at home.
- The Council does subsidise a number of bus services which otherwise would not be operated.

- 2. 20 mph zones** – question from Andrew Short:  
Why does the Mayor persist in introducing "voluntarily policed" 20 mph zones when Fishponds Road through Stapleton has been 20 mph for almost 3 years with nobody bothering to adhere to it?

#### **Summary of Mayor's response:**

- His own experience in Southville is that over time, driver behaviour has improved, and that a 20 mph zone has no significant effect on journey times.
- 20 mph zones will result in safer streets, with fewer accidents.
- In his view, 20 mph zones make drivers think about their behaviour – but behaviour changes do take time to "bed in."

- 3. MetroBus** – question from Tess Gleeson:  
Given your opposition to the MetroBus scheme pre-election, please tell us of the factors which tie your hands to continuing with the scheme?

#### **Summary of Mayor's response:**

- Prior to his election as Mayor, he had been given some misinformation by some of the campaigners opposed to rapid transit (now known as MetroBus).

- If the Council were to withdraw from the MetroBus schemes (which were being taken forward in conjunction with neighbouring authorities), the reality is that the Council would face very significant financial consequences. It would be irresponsible to terminate the schemes.

- 4. Community engagement** – question from Mark Logan:  
How does the Mayor envisage improving community engagement in the outer regions of Bristol such as Fishponds when neighbourhood partnerships have poor attendance and struggle to attract new people to engage?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- In the context of the current ward boundary review, there was likely to be an opportunity to review and reinforce neighbourhood partnerships.
- He was keen to devolve further local powers and responsibilities to neighbourhood partnerships, and to increase resources to support them. That might mean some rationalisation of the number of partnerships, also in the context of the ward boundary review.
- It would be important to share and learn from best practice, e.g. the Greater Bedminster community partnership was acknowledged to be thriving.

- 5. Arts investment** – question from Catherine Hounsome:  
You want to set aside £200,000 next year for celebrations of 250 years of Bristol Old Vic, Mayor anniversary celebrations and a feasibility study of Colston Hall. This seems a sizeable amount of money – what is the direct benefit to the massively diverse population of Bristol, not just those with a vested interest in the arts?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- This is about helping to boost the city's economy.
- The investment of money in the arts brings resultant economic benefits.
- The investment of £100k in Colston Hall feasibility work will help to further the prospects of the substantive project going forward.

- 6. Refurbishment of City Hall** – question from Cliff De La Croix:  
How much is the refurbishment of City Hall costing and how can it be justified when set against the background of budget cuts?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- The acquisition of 100 Temple Street had cost approx. £22m. This represented a very good deal for the Council.

- It was important to note the overall context whereby most of the Council's future operations would be based at 2 sites, 100 Temple Street and the refurbished City Hall. The expenditure was very much a "spend to save" investment, and would enable staff to work more flexibly and to maximum efficiency in meeting the business needs of the Council. Significant year-on-year savings would result as a result of reducing the Council's operations to 2 main buildings.

**7. Green Capital** – question from June Thorne:

In the year of Bristol being Green Capital, how can it be right to destroy grade one agricultural land? I am losing my allotment and will be offered an inferior plot of field that has already been found to be poor.

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- He was fully supportive of local food growing initiatives, which would form a key part of Bristol's year as European Green Capital.
- The new M32 "bus only" bridge would result in a reduced impact compared with the original proposal.
- He anticipated that those who did lose their allotments would be able to secure good quality alternative allotments.

**8. Local issues** – question from Catherine Hounsome:

You seem to represent Bristol well on the European stage, tackling large issues such as the arena and that we are the Green Capital next year. What are you actually doing for the issues of Bristol people, such as the housing crisis, the McDonalds planning crisis, and lack of decent secondary schools crisis?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- He was very interested in all issues affecting Bristol and its residents.
- Some large projects would bring local benefits, e.g. the arena would provide local employment and apprenticeship opportunities.
- As part of Green Capital, a very wide range of projects and initiatives would receive grant funding.

**9. Timing of question time event / residents parking** - question from Ben Hurdle:

Why did you time this event so people had to get here at rush hour? Are you going to get rid of all the residents parking schemes? If not, why not?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- He was committed to residents parking schemes, as part of the package of tackling traffic congestion, but also to improve quality of life in those neighbourhoods where the schemes were based.
- In his view, a lot of the opposition around residents parking schemes was based on unsubstantiated fear of the consequences. The experience to date (e.g. in Kingsdown) was that once introduced, the schemes were generally working well once implemented, and were popular.

- 10. Promoting the living wage** – question from Rachel Howlett:  
Bristol is considered to be a city where localism, community action and socio-economic issues have a voice. However, I am surprised at the lack of visibility of living wage employers. The Bristol Pound is widely known about, the logo clearly visible in shops, bars, businesses and in tweets etc. Could Bristol not become a leader in promoting living wage employers / businesses – including using pressure from the Council which has now signed up the scheme (I believe)? In light of being Green Capital 2015, sustainability is not just about the word “green” but the combination of social, economic and environmental factors. The living wage is greener and more sustainable.

**Summary of Mayor’s response:**

- The Council was now a living wage employer in relation to its own staff.
- The Council was also looking to reduce its pay ratio to 1:10 (i.e. the highest paid employee to earn not more than 10 times the wage of the lowest paid employee)
- Consideration was being given to the extent to which it was feasible to require the Council’s contractors to be living wage employers.
- In his view, the national minimum wage should be at the same level as the living wage – he would encourage people to lobby the political parties about this issue.

- 11. Memorial ground** – question from Diana Scrafton:  
The plight of the Memorial Ground in Horfield has received national media coverage in recent weeks and could soon be featured on national TV. Residents of Horfield and Bishopston would like to know, what is the Mayor going to do to protect this WW1 war memorial and preserve it for sport and recreation for future generations as its founders always intended?

**Summary of Mayor’s response:**

- It was important to recognise that as Mayor, he had no role or involvement in planning decisions; these were regulatory matters – decisions on major planning applications were taken by the Development Control Committee.

- In his personal view, he thought it unlikely that Sainsburys would actually proceed with the development of a supermarket on this site.

(It was noted that Zoe Willcox (the relevant Service Director) would be available to discuss this matter with the questioner at the end of this session).

- 12. McDonalds, Fishponds Road** - question from Emma Knighton:  
You have already stated that you are against the 24/7 drive thru' McDonalds in Fishponds. It also goes against the ethos of being European Green Capital. It also goes against Department of Health and Public Health England, and yet we who live here are having to fight and fund our own campaign to highlight this to the planning office. How does this encourage the everyday person to engage in democracy when it is apparent that what is good and right for an area is overridden by money? What would you do in our situation? How is this democracy? Would this be entertained at all if on Gloucester Road?

And

- 13. Playing out scheme / McDonalds** – question from Pauline Shaw:  
Lodore Road has enjoyed being part of the “playing out” scheme to make streets healthier and safer for children. Now this street may have a 2 storey, 24 hour McDonalds built right at the back of these houses, in a residential area, adversely affecting the health, wellbeing and safety of the local community. What advice would you give to us on how we can campaign against this, as a concerned, active community?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- As before, as Mayor he had no role in planning decisions.
- He would though encourage local people to make their representations known to the Council's planning officers. It was important for communities to get their views heard.
- It needed to be recognised, however, that the Council was bound by the planning legislation and national planning policy – in some cases, planning permission was not required.

(It was noted that Zoe Willcox (the relevant Service Director) would be available to discuss this matter with the questioner(s) at the end of this session).

- 14. Role of Mayor** – question from Emma Knighton:  
Why did you want to become Mayor?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- He had felt that the opportunity had to be taken to change the system of local governance in Bristol, and to raise Bristol's profile and improve the city for the benefit of all its residents.
- He had no other purpose other than trying to do the right thing for Bristol.

**Other questions taken from the floor, towards the end of the session:**

15. Question / issue raised: distribution of Green Capital grant funding to initiatives / projects

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- There were 3 elements to the grant funding:
  - a. Local grants distributed through neighbourhood partnerships.
  - b. Small grants
  - c. Strategic grants (for projects between £25-50k) which were the subject of a report to Cabinet on 16 December.
- In relation to a point raised about energy: proposals were being developed an Energy company; the Council's tenants were benefiting from the Council's approach to energy management.

16. Question / issue raised: Speedwell swimming pool

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- Given the financial position of the Council, it was not possible to invest capital in schemes which then required ongoing revenue subsidy.

17. Question / issue raised: need for better strategic planning across the West of England region

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- He was very supportive of the need to improve cross-authority strategic planning around, e.g. around housing and transport.

18. Question / issue raised: Would be support the idea of a Mayor's mobility day?

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- Yes, he would be supportive of this.

19. Question / issue raised: MetroBus - difficulty of accessing bus routes between the north fringe and east Bristol

**Response from Alistair Cox, Service Manager – City Transport:**

- It was acknowledged that further work needed to take place in connection with these routes.

20. Question / issue raised: Smart city – Big data programme

**Summary of Mayor's response:**

- Briefly outlined some of the Bristol initiatives.