

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A - SUPPLEMENTARIES

1. Councillors ACS Colburn, PR Hood-Williams, CMWRD Thomas and LJ Tyler-Lloyd

The infestation of Japanese Knotweed is a major concern across the City, however we understand that due to lack of funding the "Knotweed Officer" has been assigned to other duties. Please advise us what action is currently being taken by the Council to eradicate this pernicious weed.

Response of the Cabinet Members for Place

The City and County has the biggest Japanese knotweed problem in the UK, with latest surveys indicating approximately 250 acres of knotweed infested land. A knotweed officer was appointed on a 3 year secondment basis within the Council's Nature Conservation Team between 1998 and 2001. There has been no specific knotweed officer in post since 2001; however the problem has continued to be dealt with alongside treatment of other invasive non native plants such as Himalayan balsam and water primrose.

Between 2001 and 2009, around £220,000 of mainly grant aid was spent on treating 260,000m² of knotweed infected land as part of Council managed control programmes. Since 2009, individual departments have been responsible for arranging treatment of their own land. Regular training and Continuing Professional Practice courses are provided by the Nature Conservation Team for Council Departments, other local authorities and various partner and professional organisations. Information sheets have also been produced for members of the public to raise awareness of the problem and explain how to control and dispose of knotweed. A knotweed website is in the process of being designed.

It is not illegal to have knotweed growing on land despite the problems it can cause. The issues of waste disposal and causing the plant to spread in the wild (i.e. not in the city or in gardens) are dealt with by the Environment Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales, not by the Council. The Council has no statutory duties in relation to knotweed and does not undertake treatment on behalf of members of the public or on private land.

However a number of companies have trialled various chemicals and techniques for knotweed control in Swansea in recent years, whilst more natural control measures through the trial releases of the Psyllid bug are currently ongoing. A treatment condition is also placed on all planning permissions where knotweed is present.

2. Councillors ACS Colburn, PR Hood-Williams, CMWRD Thomas and LJ Tyler-Lloyd

Will the Housing Department of the City & County of Swansea withdraw from the Local Development Plan proposed candidate sites, the section of land at West Cross, Swansea fronting Heathwood Road, in relation to which an application has been made to the City & County of Swansea for the said land to be designated a "Village Green"? If it were to be requested for community use, this would probably save the public purse by way of legal costs alone, some £40,000.00.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Place

The submission of the land fronting Heathwood Road in West Cross as a candidate site for residential purposes was made as part of the consultative process to help inform the Local Development Plan. A similar approach was taken for all parcels of housing owned land across the authority area which met the size criteria.

Any consideration of an application for any land to be designated as a Village Green would be based on the legislative regime relevant to that process. The candidate site process is not relevant to the Village Green regime and any withdrawal or change in the submission would not have any bearing on whether any area of land should be given Village Green status.

3. Councillors CA Holley, AM Day and MH Jones

The current Leader of Council and members of his Administration were very quick to condemn the past Administration for trying to sell surplus land from the council land stock. Can the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources inform Council what new initiatives are being considered in order to raise the necessary revenue to fund the school building programme.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

It is true that the Labour administration were critical of the narrow approach taken by the previous Lib Dem led administration to this matter when in opposition - and rightly so. We were specifically critical of the previous administrations failure to raise any significant sums for the school building programme via the scheme. By April 2012 the scheme had only raised £330,000 of the £12m required. This failure could have placed the programme at risk or left a huge financial burden on the Authority or both.

Therefore a revised scheme is being prepared which includes initiatives to avoid these scenarios and assist the authority in raising the necessary sums to support the school building programme.

4. Councillors PB Black, LG Thomas and J Newbury

Will the Cabinet Member for Place provide on a ward by ward basis, the number of empty (void) council properties in June 2004, and will she also provide the same figures for April 2012.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Place

The number of empty (void) council properties in June 2004 was 450, and in April 2012 totalled 252. The following table shows a breakdown of the voids by Ward for each period.

Ward	As at 27/06/04	As at 01/04/12
Bonymaen	14	9
Castle	28	14
Clydach	14	8
Cockett	38	12
Cwmbwrla	1	3
Fairwood	0	1
Gorseinon East	0	4
Gorseinon West	0	0
Gower	1	1
Gowerton	1	2

Kingsbridge	0	0
Landore	1	2
Llansamlet	7	6
Loughor Lower	16	7
Mawr	1	1
Morrison	18	13
Mynyddbach	19	23
Penclawdd	0	1
Penderry	119	46
Penllergaer	2	0
Penyrheol	15	1
Pontardulais	3	6
Sketty	11	12
St.Thomas	5	6
Townhill	134	56
Uplands	0	1
West Cross	2	17
Total	450	252

PART B – NO SUPPLEMENTARIES

None