

Full Council 24th September Public Questions and Answers

Name of person submitting	Questions
Sarah Coffin	Yesterday evening at the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group meeting the public raised serious questions on Anaerobic Digester plant Planning breaches and Climate/Net Zero Policy. The first question asked the Committee if it would be reconsidering its present proactive policies in support of Climate Change/Global warming and Net Zero. The question made detailed reference to the growing volume of factual/technical evidence and global scientific opinions to the contrary, now openly published globally. The next three questions related to the serious breaches of Planning Conditions and lack of Enforcement concerning the farm-led Anaerobic Digesters based in Mid-Devon and what action/measures could be taken to reassert Planning balance and compliance; to ensure delivery of the Environmental/Climate/Net Zero benefits claimed now and in the future. My questions were related to the AD plants and the use of S106 legal agreements but could equally apply to large contentious Residential/livestock farming and green energy projects. Acceptance of S106 by approved Applicants indicate the intention to abide by all material or mitigating conditions attached to Planning Permission. There is an automatic right of Appeal throughout the timeline to delivery; providing evidence is shown that the condition no longer relevant or unnecessary due to changing circumstances. Perhaps the S106 could be used to remove speculative hoarding and hawking of Planning Approvals by including a completion deadline rather than a start deadline? The questions are to be answered in writing but initial questioning by Councillors seemed to indicate that any inquiry would need to be costed and there was little confidence that the necessary funds or Council staff would be available to respond to Motion 608. I therefore ask Members is democracy being throttled. If not how do Members prioritise and what constitutes an acceptable cost?

	Response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration: Thank you for your question. As you will be aware from discussions at the Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG, there is interest in this matter from Members. I have therefore now instructed officers, as per the PDG recommendation, to engage suitably qualified consultants in discussion to determine what could be contained within an advice/guidance note to inform Council work relating to Anaerobic Digester plants, the cost for the production of such an advice note, and the timetable for completion. An update will then be reported to the PDG for further decision on how to progress work and Members can further reflect upon cost and benefits. I hope that you will therefore see that, under this administration, democracy within Mid Devon is well and thriving.
Paul Elstone	Question 1: When this Councils Executive Officers made the decision to remove, the Reputation Risk relating to the failure of 3 Rivers from the Corporate Risk Register a commitment was given to provide regular updates to Audit on any remaining reputation risk. This is not happening. Hence the reason for my questions tonight. More than a year ago, this Council purchased 5 properties at Haddon Heights in Bampton, from 3 Rivers, for £3.15 million – they are still unsold. Can it be explained why Seddon’s Estate Agents stopped marketing these properties in July 2025? Response from the Chair of Council: The Council is currently in the process of changing agents, which is an operational decision, further updates of a material nature will be provided as and when necessary to the relevant Committees. Question 2: Searches of Right move and Estate Agent websites, such as Greenslade Taylor Hunt and after a site visit today, show no evidence that the five unoccupied properties are currently being marketed for sale. Are the properties currently being marketed and if so who by. If not, why not? Response from the Chair of Council: See the answer to question 1.

Question 3:

I understand that in August the building company Blu Box were hired to install fire block cladding to the ceilings of the car ports in 6 of the 9 properties - at a cost to the Council of £23,000.

Surely the fire risk is the same for all the properties, why were only 6 of the 9 properties fixed?

Response from the Chair of Council:

This work was undertaken as part of an ongoing operational snagging exercise and after conversations with the selling agents. We were advised that the garage roofs needed either re-painting or replacement plaster boarding. We decided to provide an enhanced solution by upgrading the boarding to these ceilings.

Question 4:

How, and when, was the requirement for the work identified?

Response from the Chair of Council:

The new agent recommended a number of minor improvements to the unsold properties prior to re-marketing.

Question 5:

Calculations based on evidence available shows that since purchasing the Haddon Heights properties this Council has lost at least £520,000 and rising by the day.

Property price reductions, before they were taken off the market, of £230,000.

Loss of investment income 4.8% (simple) over 18 months or circa £227,000.

Council Tax, inclusive of 100% unoccupied premium since April 2025, circa £30,000.

Utilities, management fees and landscaping cost, circa £10,000.

Fire cladding work £23,000.

This substantial financial loss is a risk to the reputation of this Council. Especially so because PDG'S are being asked to approve cost cutting measures. Members of last night's Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG were seen to be uncomfortable with some officer cost saving proposals.

Why is the status of the assets bought from 3 Rivers not being reported and as promised?

Response from the Chair of Council:

The status of these properties hasn't materially changed since they were acquired after the closure of 3Rivers. Cabinet were last updated at its meeting on the 4/3/25 when it was agreed to reduce the selling prices.

Question 6:

A visit to St Georges Court shows that, in places, it still looks like a building site this 18 months on from the development being purchased from 3 Rivers and at around £1 million pounds over valuation.

How many of the 28 flats are occupied today?

Response from the Chair of Council:

At the time of the question no flats had been occupied although 6 of the flats have been allocated and the new tenants will start to move in on Friday 3rd October. With the next batch of flats to be advertised this week.

Question 7:

Unlike Haddon Heights, there is no evidence that that MDDC have ever paid Council Tax on the St Georges Court flats. If Council Tax has not been paid, why not?

Response from the Chair of Council:

Mid Devon Housing have paid Council Tax on the properties at St Georges Council ever since we purchased them. MDH do a monthly listing of all Council Tax bills which are due, and the flats have been included since the purchase date.

Supplementary Question:

I am well used to getting responses to questions that are evasive, lack transparency or worse and this after the full 10 days.

My questions tonight are very straight forward and the officers in the room should be able to answer them off the top of their heads.

Based on the fact that a commitment was given to Audit to keep them updated, will officers provide the answers to all members this evening instead?

	Response from the Chair of Council: As a number of questioners have been repeatedly advised, if questions are submitted in advance of the meeting in compliance with our constitutional arrangements, they will receive a full answer at the meeting. It should also be remembered that as some of the assets being discussed are still being marketed then commercial restrictions may be placed on our ability to provide comprehensive responses to questions raised.
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