

**CABINET – 27 March 2018****PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Public Questions****Question 1: Mr George Hesse**

My question relates to The Library Gardens, West Street, Farnham. These gardens are a highly valued open public space in the Town Conservation Area. In recent years they have become less accessible to the public and are deteriorating rapidly as a consequence of considerable neglect. There are crumbling walls, collapsing safety balustrades. Heras site fencing all over the place and the lower part closed off by a heavy steel gate including the run down tennis court which is padlocked. Until recently these gardens were looked after by Farnham Town Council on behalf of SCC but a few years ago the management of these gardens reverted to Surrey who now obviously find it difficult keeping these gardens fully open to the public and in good condition. The standard of gardening is basic grass cutting, leaving edges, shrubs and roses overgrown. They are closed every Sunday and Bank Holiday throughout the year and the bottom gate, which has been a pedestrian access for many years is now sealed off with a metal fence. Last year on the 9th March (2017) I asked a public question at a meeting of FTC's Full Council, in which I requested consideration be given to transferring responsibility back to FTC, to which the then SCC councillor for Farnham Central, in which the Library Gardens are located (and who is also an FTC councillor) Pat Frost, advised that "she would pursue this". I again raised this matter as a public question at the meeting of FTC's Full Council held on 2nd November 2017 at which the FTC Town Clerk stated that several attempts had been made to negotiate the resumption of the management of the Library Gardens from SCC but as yet, no solution had been found. I yet again raised this matter as a public question at the last Full Council meeting held on 8th March 2018 and was advised that there was unlikely to be any transfer until January 2019, which is the next time tenders are due to be invited for management of the gardens. This leaves the gardens in a continuing downward spiral of neglect and ever more hazardous to public safety and another Summer when local residents and visitors are deprived of the full enjoyment of them.

The Library Gardens are recognised and named as an important green space in Farnham's Town Centre Conservation Area in Farnham's Neighbourhood Plan, which in May 2017 was approved by a 88% vote in a referendum and which is now adopted by Waverley Borough Council as material consideration, as subsequently confirmed in Waverley Borough Council's recently approved and adopted Local Plan --- Part One. The public should not continue to be denied access to the Library Gardens and I would, therefore ask , is there any reason preventing the transfer of responsibility to FTC at the earliest possible opportunity --- so that they can again be fully reopened to the public seven days a week, restoring the rear pedestrian gate and the tennis court?

**Reply:**

Farnham Gardens is a great space and we are pleased to open it to the local community, local schools and other groups. Being the Library Gardens, it is Surrey County Council staff working at the library that open and close the gates to the garden. This they do this in line with the library opening hours, 6 days per week, Monday to Saturday. The gardens have always been locked overnight, and on the advice of Surrey Police, to minimise the risk of damage from vandalism as there has been in the past some horrible vandalism, the gardens are now being accessed by the upper gates closest to the Library.

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The gardens are comprised of lots of different areas; a meadow area in which we retain long grasses to encourage wildlife, a more formal garden with beds, an ornamental area with wall, a fountain and seating area and tennis courts. Unfortunately the tennis courts have been closed to the public for some time now. This is due to the presence of Japanese Knotweed, a noxious weed, which has deteriorated the surface of the tennis court making it uneven and broken. The knotweed has been treated over the past growing seasons but it is yet to fully be eradicated. When it is eradicated, our intention is to resurface the courts and open them up again to the public and maintenance money has been set aside for this purpose.

In addition, there is a project underway to rebuild and repair the wall which is badly ageing. The haras fencing is to secure off access around the wall area. Also major landscaping works are planned with the creation of new flower beds and additional planting happening in Summer 2018.

Farnham Town Council used to look after the grounds maintenance in the Gardens some five or more years ago and Surrey would be happy to have further discussions with them over taking this on again when we are out of contract with our current provider. However, this would not change the situation as regards the tennis court, the bottom gate or the opening hours of the gardens.

The gardens are a valued and well used part of the community and we need to ensure that they remain so.

**Mr Tim Oliver**  
**Cabinet Member for Property & Business Services**  
**27 March 2018**

**Question 2: Ms Alexandra Bannatyne**

Newlands Corner once belonged to the Crown. The King had his race course there. Newlands Corner was subject to a royal decree by the King in 1400's-1500's that it be 'for the open and free use of the common man'.

In the year of two royal weddings please would SCC not install car parking charges as an act of goodwill?

**Reply:**

The land is still available for access by the 'common man' but in order to maintain that access we need to generate an income to provide the facilities that are now required and to manage the land and paths. The kings and queens of the 1400s and 1500s would not have anticipated that most people would arrive by motor vehicle or that over 500,000 people would visit the site in a year. Because of the need to raise income to maintain that access we cannot agree to your suggestion.

We wish the royal couples well for the future and hope they enjoy Surrey's Countryside.

**Mr Mike Goodman**  
**Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**  
**27 March 2018**