

Full Council – 17 October 2019

Questions submitted for Public Participation Period

Question -1 Submitted by (Dr) Kevin Shillington

Climate Emergency – Solar Panels

“According to *Dorset Council News* (Summer 2019), the Council recognises that it needs to be more ambitious in following up its declaration of a climate emergency in the Dorset Council Area.

An emergency requires emergency action and Dorset Council must not be found wanting on this.

So, will Dorset Council follow the lead of Camden Council in London and make it a requirement for obtaining planning consent on all new structures that solar panels be installed on the roofs of all new domestic, industrial and commercial premises, *with immediate effect*, even if that entails going beyond national planning regulations and if necessary standing up to central government and developer company lobbyists?

Will you take up this challenge?”

Response from Cllr David Walsh:

“Dorset Council recognises the importance of action to tackle a warming climate, and our declaration of a climate emergency is a clear demonstration of the commitment to make a positive difference within the remit of our responsibilities. We are reviewing our policies and activities in the light of the climate emergency to ensure we take appropriate action to reduce Dorset’s carbon footprint and to this effect the Council has set up a Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel. The example of Camden in taking a lead on the climate emergency has been mentioned. As I understand it, Camden is home to the country’s first climate assembly and it was reported in the national press that the assembly ‘...has agreed on 17 proposals for action to tackle the climate crisis, including installing solar panels on all available roofs and cutting fossil fuels out of local government developments’¹. In fact the 17 actions include a range of measures, one of which is to ‘fit solar panels on as many homes as possible’.

The Camden Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis is an important forum for residents and the action plan it has prepared provides a valuable community steer for the local authority, businesses and residents in developing their

strategies and taking any necessary actions. None of these actions proposes that all new buildings needing planning permission be required to install solar panels with immediate effect. Nor do the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly have the status of statutory planning policies.

Dorset Council recognises that the planning system has a key part to play in tackling climate change and we are embarking on a new local plan which will set out a strategy and policy framework for the sustainable use and development of land in Dorset, having regard to the critical importance of minimising the climate impact of human activity. In advance of the new local plan, we will continue to promote and secure carbon reduction measures in new developments where appropriate and feasible to do so.

To insist on measures that are not supported by planning policy or other legislative mechanisms would expose the Council to a greater risk of planning appeals and associated claims for costs by appellants. This I fear would deflect our limited resources away from responding effectively to the climate emergency, which we intend to do via the development of well-evidenced policies, strategies and actions that will enable the Council to make a meaningful difference to Dorset's carbon footprint and foster resilient places."

[The Guardian](#), 21 July 2019

Question - 2 Submitted by Alistair Chisholm

Housing numbers for Dorset

"A recent independent report, commissioned by the Devon group of the CPRE, questioned the Government's figures for the housing needs of the county. The Government figures in question were produced before three hugely significant reports; The State of Nature report by the UK National Biodiversity Network, the UN report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the UN report on Climate Change. The figures also pre-date this Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency made early in June this year. This independent Devon report concluded that the Government's target numbers were hugely over-estimated. Most of the new homes were planned to be built on green field sites and, furthermore, two-thirds of Devon's new housing will be bought by people moving into the county. Government targets did little to address the real housing needs of the county yet the Housing minister avoided answering questions on this matter when he spoke at a housing seminar in Exeter in March 2019 to launch the report. Indeed, it later transpired that he had not even read this professionally produced, independent report.

What plans, if any, does this council have to question the unrevised housing numbers for Dorset proposed in 2014 by central Government?

If, as seems increasingly likely, the numbers have not only been hugely over estimated but do little or nothing to address the real and urgent needs of our county for truly “affordable” homes (for rent, purchase or a mix of the two), why should the Council tax payers go along with/accept any Local Plan for Dorset which simply feeds the voracious appetite of developers and landowners and does little or nothing for either the county’s residents or its precious countryside?”

Response from Cllr David Walsh

“The council has not yet made any decisions about whether to challenge the housing numbers proposed under the national standard methodology.

The numbers are produced using two inputs, the Office for National Statistics household forecasts, and the most recent affordability data for the area. Both of these figures change regularly and so the number will change during the plan preparation process.

These numbers provide the starting point for identifying local housing need in a local plan, and where they are used as the local housing need figure in the plan, there should normally be little debate on the issue at the examination. Councils do have the option of arguing for a different figure, though this would need to be robustly defended at the local plan examination. As councils are required to plan for the needs of all sectors of the housing market, any arguments based around meeting the needs only for affordable housing, or only for the needs of the currently resident population, are not likely to succeed.

Dorset also needs housing in order to support the local economy, as we need people to be able to move into the area to take up employment.”