

Question from Cllr N Ireland

1. Agenda Item #7 – Q2 Performance Update

“I note with some concern that in the latest performance update against our council's plan there is a significant shortfall in the number of affordable homes delivered. Ignoring for now the fact that the 300 homes per annum is a wholly inadequate target given the housing list extends to something like 5000, the facts are that we've only achieved 75% in the first half-year, leaving another 186 before year end just to break even. As a member of one of this council's planning committees, I observe that most of our meetings have at least one item asking for a reduction or the complete removal of the provision for affordable housing in a development previously approved. What is this council going to do in the remaining 3+ years of its term to ensure that not only we meet the 300/year target of affordable homes, but significantly exceed it for the benefit of our residents?”

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Housing

In the first two quarters of the year 114 new affordable homes were delivered.

As you will be aware all developments have suffered delays this year which has effected delivery.

Developers are working hard to catch up and it is also worth noting that this is the final year of the Homes England Affordable Housing Funding Programme for the five year period 2016 – 21. This means RPs will be keen to complete units that have grant attached to this programme.

There are a number of developments for affordable housing which plan to complete this year. We estimate that a further 200 affordable homes will be completed before the end of March 2021. This figure may change as there are a number of short term factors that could affect these homes being completed, such as Covid and Brexit.

Examples of developments that will deliver affordable homes this year include Poundbury in Dorchester, Cuthbury Close in Wimborne, Flaxfield Rise in Beaminster, Curtis Field in Weymouth, Lower Road in Stalbridge, Compass Point in Swanage and the Platinum Skies development for affordable home ownership for older people in Sherborne.

The Council is working hard with Registered Providers and Homes England to increase the supply of affordable housing in Dorset. Homes England recently published details of their 2021 – 2026 funding programme and we are supporting RPs in making funding bids.

There are a number of all affordable schemes that are being bought through which will use Homes England funding to develop a range of housing tenures. Recently completed all affordable schemes include 36 homes in Mosterton and 20 homes in Longburton. These developments have a planning policy compliant amount of

affordable included in the S106 and grant funding is used to deliver the rest of the site as affordable.

Examples of all affordable developments coming forward include sites in Beaminster, Stalbridge, Blandford, Gillingham, Okeford Fitzpaine, Sherborne and Weymouth. These developments usually include a mix of rented and shared ownership housing.

The Council will continue to work with RPs to increase the number of land led developments coming forward. These sites will combine with homes delivered through planning policy on open market developments, rural exception sites and community led housing schemes to ensure a positive pipeline of schemes.

The Council are working to increase the amount of temporary accommodation available. Examples include the acquisition of a 3 bedroom adapted bungalow in Wareham, previously a Travel Lodge had been used for households with disabilities, and four relocatable units also in Wareham.

The Housing Team are planning a number of acquisitions and leases to further increase the stock of temporary accommodation and have successfully bid for Government funding through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.

All our current local plans include policies for the provision of affordable housing within general housing developments. The provision of affordable housing does however reduce the viability of development, and as market conditions vary over time, it is inevitable that in some cases it is not possible to secure policy-compliant levels of affordable housing. Viability is always thoroughly tested when this is the case, with developers asked to provide evidence which is then independently assessed on behalf of the council. Viability issues will also be tested through the process of preparing the new local plan, reducing the likelihood of viability arguments on applications being successful other than in exceptional cases.

2. Agenda Item #9 – Local Plan Consultation

“The Ward I represent in Dorset Council is entirely rural, ranging from small settlements such as Upton and Ringstead to the largest village of Crossways. Apart from the latter, all the settlements I represent are regarded under the current Local Plan as unsustainable and recently, post Dorset Council’s emergence, these villages have been subject to a strict application of a sustainability rule and essentially denied any opportunity for new builds, unless perversely for ‘holiday accommodation’ when it’s apparently OK. In virtually all cases these proposed residential developments, many profoundly towards the “Eco” and affordable end of the spectrum, have been fully supported by the local parish councils and residents as they realise that without development of suitable housing, their communities will atrophy, their village shop close, their children leave. This council’s proposed Local Plan does not address these issues. It persists with notions of 15 miles sustainability when most people don’t work in their local town, it ignores the fact that rural bus services won’t suddenly emerge as a panacea for all when we have absolutely no policy to inject

the funds or subsidies necessary to sustain the service levels required (and whilst we also shamefully continue to pay the bare minimum possible for bus pass use), and it completely ignores the fact that ICE vehicles are banned from sale in 10 years' time - BEV journeys have zero emissions assuming the charging source is RE friendly i.e. distance doesn't matter. The proposed Local Plan places the communities I represent all in Tier 4 bar one i.e. no housing. A more suitable policy would be to allow development within or adjacent to such settlements if they meet a suitable standard, for example Passivhaus. Will the Cabinet endorse and enact this proposal?"

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The strategy within the local plan is to focus development into locations where the distance people need to travel to meet their day to day needs is minimised and where sustainable travel options (walking, cycling and public transport) are available. This not only reduces the resources consumed whilst making journeys but also reduces reliance on car travel, thereby reducing congestion within towns. These active travel options help to create healthy communities where people are physically active.

The relative concentration of development also has benefits for service provision: more scattered development for example results in increased costs such as those for school transport.

Where smaller communities support additional development in their settlements however, it is still possible for them to propose this through neighbourhood plans.