

Cabinet of 7 September 2021

Public Questions

1. Question from Giles Watts on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network (DorsetCAN)

Consultation for the Draft Local Plan closed on 15th March. At the Cabinet meeting on 18th May we asked when the submission and feedback from the consultation would be made publicly available. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, David Walsh, responded that “it is likely that they will all be published in July”. As of 1st September this has not yet happened. Can Cllr Walsh please update us on when the consultation documents will now be published and, given the further delays, his new timescale for revising, submitting and examining Dorset’s Local Plan.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

Officers have been working hard to process the consultation responses however given the high response rate, it is taking longer than expected. We anticipate publishing the consultation responses before the end of September.

2. Question from Mike Allen

In July I asked the Cabinet whom they expected to buy the nearly 10,000 extra dwellings planned in the draft Local Plan, extra that is over the Ministry of Housing’s projected household growth in Dorset due to population, migration and household size changes.

The Cabinet reply was that the extra housing:

“...enables for the formation of households from those who already live in Dorset where a suitable property is not available (such as young adults who live with their parents) and for those who need or wish to move to Dorset and where a suitable property is not available.”

I want to probe a little deeper please. The answer says that the extra housing will be more suitable for so-called hidden-households and for extra in-comers from other areas. One can only assume that “suitable” here means affordable. So the plan is for nearly 10,000 extra more-affordable dwellings to be built, generating extra demand as a result of their lower prices presumably.

Remembering that current population trends, projected by the Ministry and the independent ONS, do not project these households to form, there must be something in the Council’s planning that is going to cause these extra dwellings to be more affordable than expected. Either wages are planned to rise faster than house prices, or house prices are planned to fall relative to wages, or both.

Marginally, house prices rise when incomes rise, so one must assume that house prices are planned by the Council to fall relative to wages, due to some undeclared mechanism. The plan surely must quantify the actual fall in prices expected to be necessary.

Since building costs and margins cannot be expected to fall, those price falls must be found in reduced land values. Land values must be planned to fall enough to bring 10,000 new households into the housing market.

So it is this economic mechanism I want to ask about:

Please can the Cabinet explain how they expect the house price falls to occur that will enable 10,000 extra households to form in Dorset over the Plan period 2021-38?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

An increase in supply of suitable homes will enable the formation of new households. Suitable homes are homes that meet the need of a resident whether this be in terms of size, type or tenure and does not purely relate to cost. A proportion of the new homes being provided will meet the planning definition of affordable housing. The provision of a range of homes of different sizes, types and tenures will also enable existing residents to move to homes that more closely meet their needs thereby freeing up the existing dwelling stock for others.

3. Question from Julie Leah

As the Environment Bill will have long term implications for Dorset, please could the council explain what they are doing to ensure that the Environmental Bill is rigorous enough to serve Dorset well and how its implementation will affect the CEES and DLP?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services

Dorset Council have been working closely with partners including Natural England and the Dorset Local Nature Partnership to put ourselves on the front foot when the Environment Bill is enacted. Among other actions, work has been undertaken to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and to integrate the requirement for the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain into local plan policies.

From an air quality perspective, the Council has watched the development of the Bill and supported comment through the consultation. There has been concern about the range of pollutants proposed to be included and how new provisions will be resourced. The detail of specific pollutant limits is awaited, particularly in relation to small particulates.

The Council will shortly start consultation on a Local Air Quality Action Plan and detail resulting from the Act will be incorporated.

The Government published the Resources and Waste Strategy in December 2018. Through the Environment Bill, Defra are seeking powers which will allow them to make regulations to implement each of the three reforms:

- Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPR) in the UK
- A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Consistency of materials collected for recycling for households and businesses in England.

These have recently been consulted on and Dorset Council provided a full and comprehensive response to each of these consultations.

4. Question from Andrew Carey

Cllr Ray Bryan has publicly stated his intention (Dorset Council Website, May 25, 2021) to: "make Dorset the greenest county in England".

The UK100 pledge says: *"We will bring our council emissions to Net Zero by 2030* and we will work with our residents and businesses to bring our wider communities' emissions in line with Net Zero as soon as possible (and by 2045* at the latest)."* Dorset Council's target dates of 2040 and 2050 fall well short of this pledge.

Wiltshire Council, Somerset County Council and Cornwall Council are among 13 county councils that have already signed the UK100 pledge (as well as many district, town and city councils). Dorset Council has not. Dorset is therefore not even among the 13 greenest counties in England. Given the urgent call for action in the IPCC's latest Climate Change report, will Dorset Council now support Cllr Bryan's aspiration and sign the UK100 pledge?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Following an in-depth review of the options available to Dorset Council to transition to carbon neutrality, the implications for the Council, a lengthy public consultation and approval by Council the Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action plans sets a target date for Dorset Council to become Carbon Neutral of 2040. The Strategy sets out a budget for the reduction of carbon emissions by the Council with key milestones being:

2025 – 40% reduction

2030 – 71% reduction

2035 – 90% reduction

2040 – 100% reduction

Dorset Council believes the target it has set is both achievable and realistic and has made significant progress following a grant from Central Government of £19 million

to reduce carbon emissions from its built estate, the decarbonization of the power tools used in front line operations as well as the installation of additional electric charging points, a replacement programme for some its vehicle fleet and low carbon road repair methods.

As a result of the target that Dorset Council has set it is unable to sign the UK100 pledge which commits to carbon neutrality by 2030 however we will aim to have brought about a minimum of a 71% reduction in our carbon emissions and will continue to put the response to climate change at the Centre of the work of the Council.