

Public Questions – Cabinet 7 December 2021

Questions from Mike Allen

Question 1 - Local Plan effective community engagement

The new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, appearing before the Housing Communities & Local Government Select Committee recently, spoke of future planning priorities:

- Net zero
- Thoughtful local plans which have maximum community buy-in
- A role for the community ultimately in determining what is right

The NPPF para 16 specifies that “Plans should ... be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities ...”

Thousands of people in Dorset responded to the draft Local Plan, the majority in disagreement (a sample of 3,000 responses shows 75% disagreement). Many are concerned about housing not being required to be net-zero in use. Many don't buy-in to the need to build so many homes on greenfield sites near where they live. Many are concerned that the new homes won't be truly affordable for those on lower wages.

What assurance can the Cabinet offer Local Plan respondents that their concerns will really shape the next draft of the Plan, making the consultation truly effective? Examples would be welcome of how the next iteration of the Plan might change as a result of effective community engagement.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning:

We had a very good response to the local plan consultation, and the comments made will be vital in shaping the plan in future. Alongside them, however, we also need to consider the importance of providing enough housing to meet the needs of the economy and community in future, and doing so within the environmental and viability constraints that exist.

Question 2 - Out-of-date housing targets and building in the Green Belt

The new Secretary of State for Levelling Up Housing & Communities has suggested recently at a Parliamentary Committee that there is leeway for local authorities in meeting Government housing targets when constraints such as AONB and Green Belt are present, and that the Planning Inspectorate should show more reasonableness in this. He thought also that the underlying assumptions in the housing targets are probably out of date.

Despite its population actually falling recently (ONS 2018-19), BCP currently has an out-of-date and excessive Government housing target of over 2700 homes per year. Constrained

by the sea and its Green Belt, BCP may require Dorset Council to help by planning thousands of those homes in their area instead. Would it not be more reasonable to think that both Dorset and BCP are constrained and both should accept the offer of leeway in their housing targets, so that no new estates need to be built in the Green Belt or other protected land?

Response for the Portfolio Holder for Planning:

Firstly, should anything in Government policy around housing numbers change during the preparation of the plan, we will be able to take that into account and make changes before it is adopted.

In the meantime, we are working closely with BCP Council as they consider the appropriate level of housing for their plan area and whether they are likely to have unmet need. We will take account of their latest evidence in preparing our plan.