

MEMBER QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 16

QUESTION 1

COUNCILLOR TED CLARKE will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Growth

What efforts are being made to ensure that BT do, as a matter of course, install fibre optic cable on all new greenfield developments sites, particularly in the Shrewsbury area?

COUNCILLOR NIC LAURENS, the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Growth will reply:

As a commercial company, BT isn't under any obligation to provide access to fibre broadband on new build sites. The onus rests with the developer to arrange for fibre broadband to be installed. Having said that, since September 2016, Openreach have agreed that 'Fibre To The Premises' infrastructure will be provided free of charge for those developments of 30 or more plots, for more information see: <https://www.ournetwork.openreach.co.uk/property-development.aspx>.

This is not just a Shrewsbury issue – it affects all of Shropshire as it is a national issue, as evidenced by the following investigation conducted by cable.co.uk and reported in April 2017, see: <https://www.cable.co.uk/news/investigation-why-broadband-in-britains-new-builds-is-so-dreadful-only-1-in-20-homebuilders-is-confident-its-even-available-700001726/>.

Shropshire Council has no direct influence over the installation of fibre optic cable on new greenfield developments sites. Having said that, both the Planning Department and Connecting Shropshire are aware that new build housing developments are still being built without access to superfast broadband delivered over fibre optic cable. Here are examples of ways that the Council has tried to correct this market failure:

Planning:

The planning department raises the issue of fibre connections in pre-application meetings with developers and during the consideration of planning applications and the hook to deliver enhanced broadband sits within Core Strategy policy CS13: Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment which says that Shropshire will plan to deliver sustainable economic growth and in particular emphasis on supporting the development of ICT broadband/infrastructure. The planners' approach is facilitative and one of encouraging developers to make this provision at the construction stage of a project.

Note: To date, a scheme has not been refused for failing to supply a fibre connection but if the scheme was acceptable in all other respects then a refusal on this ground alone would be unlikely to be sustainable at appeal.

Connecting Shropshire:

In April 2016, Connecting Shropshire hosted a Fibre New Builds Briefing Event to bring together developers and broadband infrastructure providers. There are plans to hold a similar event later this year.

Connecting Shropshire has regular dialogue with housing developers and Openreach's Fibre New Builds Team in order to influence and encourage the provision of fibre-based broadband in new housing developments.

QUESTION 2

COUNCILLOR KEVIN PARDY will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services

During the 2014 AGM of SALC I presented a motion urging HM Government to put in place legislation to ensure Sprinklers were fitted as part of Building Regulations in all new build. The motion received full support apart from one vote. Sadly NALC could not support the motion as no other member council raised the matter.

This motion was fully supported by Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue service.

It is stated that not one life has been lost where sprinkler systems have been in situ and that damage to property can be very much reduced, indeed I was in attendance on the night of the IRA bombings in Shrewsbury August 1992. On this night incendiary devices and a bomb exploded in Shrewsbury Castle causing devastating damage, other incendiary devices were placed in Staks furniture shop in the Charles Darwin Centre and in Wades under the Market Hall. On arrival at Staks breathing apparatus wearers searched the building and found that the fire was extinguished, Staks had a sprinkler system in place.

My question is:

Will the Council be lobbying HM Government to devise legislation in order that all new build, including domestic homes, will as part of building regulations insist on sprinkler systems being fitted. And in the meantime will Shropshire Council explore ways in which it can insist that developers include sprinkler systems in new build.

COUNCILLOR ROBERT MACEY the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services will reply:

Shropshire Council applies the national Building Regulations in relation to matters of fire safety. In England there is no requirement to install domestic sprinklers but they can be considered where the usual fire safety guidance cannot be achieved as a compensatory feature for life safety purposes.