

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Questions for Shropshire Council 20 September 2018

Question 1

Councillor Andy Boddington will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing Development:

The new NPPF came into force in July. It states that good design creates better places to live and work and makes development more acceptable to communities. Councils must ensure that developments “are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping” and they should also be “sympathetic to local character and history”. Councils should set out clear design expectations and detail how these will be tested for planning applications.

The new NPPF also calls for building at higher densities. MCHLG data (P331) records that Shropshire is achieving an average housebuilding density of just 18 dwellings per hectare. Only 11 of 327 councils across England build at a lower density. What plans does the council have:

- 1) To set out its design expectations?
- 2) To establish a design panel(s) to guide the council on major developments?
- 3) To boost the planning teams’ expertise in design?
- 4) To increase housebuilding density without compromising design quality?

Councillor Robert Macey will reply:

- 1) I am pleased Councillor Boddington has raised the issues of design in their broadest sense. It is increasingly becoming an issue raised by stakeholders to the planning process and our communities and one that I and officers are keen to promote greater awareness and understanding. Accepting that it pre-dated the NPPF revision the Council already sets out its design expectations in SAMDev policy MD2 which was adopted less than 3 years ago and these policies are proving successful and impactful in planning decisions that have also been upheld at appeal. The revision to the NPPF does provide scope for the Council implementing the requirements of the policy in a more rigorous manner than might previously have been the case. This will be encouraged through facilitating more officer and member training in relation to design considerations.
- 2) No design panels currently exist across the Council although informal panels have previously been convened when considered appropriate in both Shrewsbury and Ludlow. It is something that could be considered for the future perhaps as part of the pre-application advice process. In the meantime officers are establishing a development accreditation scheme working with developers and architects to help deal with design and qualitative issues. This will then link in to the annual Design and Conservation annual awards that are already established and in this way we will lead

and encourage best practice more positively. Good design is of course more than simply aesthetics, it is about creating places that work for all users and promote positive behaviours and sustainable solutions.

- 3) In order to build the level of experience across the team as a whole, formal training is being encouraged with a number of officers being supported with additional training on accredited planning courses, and design had already been identified as an area where specialist training across the team would be highly beneficial. The NPPF revision has reiterated this and further training will be provided within a matter of months.
- 4) It is recognised that housing density in Shropshire has in the past been influenced by a developer desire to build and sell larger properties. That approach does in any case seem to be changing, and officers are actively encouraging the provision of smaller more 'affordable' dwellings at higher densities in appropriate locations, whilst trying to maintain good design. It must be recognised that increased density does bring with it increased sensitivities with regard to privacy, amenity, and relationships with surrounding land uses.

Question 2

Councillor Andy Boddington will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing Development:

The South Planning Committee has not met for three months. In past years it has considered a wide range of applications from remote affordable housing to tables outside a café and from retail developments to urban extensions. Many applications that unitary Councillors put forward to be considered are currently rejected by planning managers as lacking "material reasons" for a committee call-in.

- 1) Why has business for the South Planning Committee dried up?
- 2) What are the specific material reasons used by planning managers to decide which applications go to Planning Committee? Where are these laid out in Council or national planning guidance?

Councillor Robert Macey will reply:

- 1) Business for the South Committee has not dried up, it has simply been a fact that for a small period there have been no applications ready for determination by the Committee that meet the appropriate triggers for referral. The Committee is meeting this month and will have a relatively large agenda.
- 2) The process for Committee or delegated determination of planning applications is set out in Part 8 of the Council's constitution. There are triggers for discussion with the relevant Chair and Vice-Chair about whether a Committee decision is required and the outcomes of these meetings, including reasons, are published on the application files.

Question 3

Councillor Dan Morris will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport:

In the rural ward I represent (Burnell), there are 3 excellent Primary Schools, Dorrington, Conover and Longnor. The Parish Councils of each village, and the head teachers of these schools, have indicated they would like speed reduction measures, including 20mph limits, outside these schools. I strongly support them in this.

Anecdotally, many of the schools I see in urban areas in Shropshire appear to have at least 20mph limits immediately outside their schools. However, in many rural wards the opposite appears to be true.

My question to Portfolio Holder Councillor Davenport is why do rural schools appear to be treated differently from schools in towns with speed reduction measures, and would he support me in a campaign to consult on a blanket 20mph speed limit outside all schools in Shropshire if the local population so desired it?

Councillor Steve Davenport will reply:

1. There has been no specific programme for implementation of 20mph schemes outside schools in Shropshire. Rather, we target accident sites and prioritised community concerns with **appropriate** interventions; these schemes can include 20mph speed restrictions or other traffic management measures. In the past, 20mph speed restrictions were introduced to support schools with higher proportions of pupils travelling to school by non-motorised modes of transport, which would typically be in urban areas.
2. Shropshire Council currently has an agreed approach for the implementation of 20mph speed restrictions on a site by site basis which was approved by the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport in 2013.
3. In Shropshire 20mph restrictions are currently only considered in the following locations:
 - Outside schools or where there are high numbers of vulnerable road users;
 - On urban residential streets in specific cases (where wide community support can be demonstrated, where there is evidence that streets are being used by people on foot and on bicycles and where the characteristics of the street are suitable) and,
 - On town centre streets / pedestrian dominated areas.

Where appropriate, Shropshire Council advocates design speeds of 20mph or below as part of any new residential developments.

4. There are a number of key considerations that need to be taken into account if such schemes are to be progressed:

- Is a 20mph speed restriction the most suitable measure to implement to address a defined problem?
- Is it likely to have a measurable and positive speed reducing effect?
- Is there something that would better address the community's concerns?
- Is implementation of a 20mph speed limit going to need additional physical measures to promote self-compliance and is this suitable in the given location?

Schemes such as this are entirely funded from the Integrated Transport Block capital grant awarded by the Department for Transport. Shropshire Council's entire Highways and Transport capital budget has been reduced by £5m in each of the next two financial years (2018/19 and 2019/20) and there has been a proportionate impact on the budget available to undertake Integrated Transport work. Therefore, an interim re-prioritisation of the use of the Integrated Transport settlement has been put in place.

The focus of the Integrated Transport programme of work will continue to be accident cluster site schemes, based on recorded accident data, and post-scheme safety reviews. However, the submission of new community led road safety concerns from town and parish councils will be put on hold until the review of budgets in 2020. There is currently insufficient funding to progress with the development of a programme of introducing 20mph speed restrictions outside of all schools in Shropshire