

COUNCIL 19TH DECEMBER 2019

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Question from Mark Fermor

On 18 November Council officers held a discussion workshop inviting public participation at which the Council stated that

‘7.7% annual reductions will be required to reach Zero 2030’

Last week the UN meeting in Madrid faced the reality that 2030 is too late to ensure we avoid runaway climate catastrophe. The Secretary General made this plea:

‘Leaders at all levels are requested to step-up to the challenge and demonstrate that business as usual is no longer acceptable’.

The pace of change in our lives now needed exceeds the comprehension of most of us and it is only once a target date is set that we can start to face the choices needed. Failure to set a target date in May has led to Shropshire continuing to go the wrong direction. Please can the Council now undertake to set a target date before we lose more time. This is an emergency and we need to start acting like it. It is abundantly clear that 2030 is already too late.

Please can the Council commit to making a plan to do everything within the Councils power to make Shropshire carbon neutral by 2030.

It is only when a target date is set that you will face the reality of choices that need to be made and provide some leadership to the people of Shropshire. The people of Shropshire are looking to you for an adequate response to the emergency we all face. We know that we need to act now, but without a plan from you it is not clear what changes we should make.

Response from Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Climate Change:

The Strategy Framework recommended for approval today gives a clear commitment to reduce Shropshire Council’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net carbon zero by 2030. Taking early action on what we can directly control is considered to be a more effective approach than expending significant effort in planning and target setting.

The Strategy Framework recommended for approval today gives a clear commitment that Shropshire Council will use its experience to work with others and provide community leadership to help reduce Shropshire’s overall carbon footprint. However, much more work and evidence is needed before a target date can be identified for net zero GHG emissions for the county as a whole.

With regard to establishing a target for Shropshire sooner than 2030; achieving net carbon zero for Shropshire Council by 2030 will be challenging but is considered achievable. More work is needed in this context to identify our indirect (Scope 3) emissions. However, as the report already notes, it is crucial that we don't stop acting just because we are planning, and the Council will continue to take action to reduce its carbon emissions and to support similar action by others. Shropshire Council will use its experience to work with others and provide community leadership to help reduce Shropshire's overall carbon footprint. Much more work and evidence is needed before a target date can be identified for net zero GHG emissions for the county as a whole.

Question from Steven Mulloy

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts - LEP Progress Review, published 5th July 2019, criticised LEP's saying:

"LEPs have also continued to underspend their local growth funding allocations every year since 2015–16, calling into question their capacity to deliver the complex projects they said were critical to economic growth in their areas."

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/1754/175402.htm>

The Marches LEP considered this review at their meeting on 23rd July 2019.

At the 7th November 2019 emergency meeting of the Marches LEP, this Council sought agreement for the merger of the OLR and NWR schemes, part of which is being funded by the LEP.

This Council told the LEP "If the proposal was approved by LEP Board it would be presented to the full council meeting on 19th December 2019".

The minutes of the LEP Board record that:

<1576237894718blob.jpg>

Inspection of the agenda for the full council meeting of the 19th December 2019 shows that the merger of the two schemes is not on the agenda, although it is on the agenda for Cabinet on the 16th December to be heard behind closed doors. Whilst the Cabinet may be the executive decision-making body, due process requires this council to debate and agree on any merger of the two schemes, and as noted above, it is a condition of LEP funding that they do.

Question

Given the above, may I ask:

1. Why the proposed merger of the Oxon Link Road and North West Road has not been put on the agenda for consideration by Full Council?

2. Without this on the agenda, how can Shropshire satisfy the condition set by the LEP?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport:

- 1. The resolved detailed design and Full Business Case incorporating the merged schemes, will be considered for approval by Full Council prior to submission to DfT in Autumn 2021 in line with the Outline Business Case already approved by Full Council 16th May 2019.*
- 2. The LEP Management Board has been updated on, and accepted, the revised OLR / NWRR merged programme, incorporating the Autumn 2021 FBC gateway date 7th Nov 2019.*

Question from Malcolm Andrew, Chair, On behalf of Trefonen Rural Protection Group Management Committee

Planning Policy Local Plan Review & Climate Change Policy.

Q1. Can the Council confirm that the Local Plan Review is being properly resourced with adequate officers and support to ensure that all aspects of evidence base detail are accurate?

With the change in role of Mr Adrian Cooper from Planning Policy & Strategy Manager to be the Climate Change Task Force Leader in September 2019 the small Planning Policy Officer team has both lost its Manager and been reduced in number at a vital stage of the Review with the Draft Final Plan.

It must be incumbent upon the Council to properly resource this vital task that will determine the scale and location of development across the whole county until 2036.

Q2. Can the Council confirm that the Draft 'Final Plan' will be scrutinized before final consultation and submission for Examination to ensure it factually accurate and "sound"?

We have identified and advised Officers of anomalies and inaccuracies in both the original and 'Updated' Hierarchy of Settlements scoring which have influenced outcomes and relaxations of policy wording and thereby settlement status and allocations. In our view these issues with the Evidence Base might lead to the current Draft Plan being considered 'unsound' by the Inspector. We have raised those concerns with Cabinet and Officers, and the Place Overview Committee. However, the responses are that there will be another chance to comment at Final Plan stage and, most worryingly, that scrutiny will be left to the independent Planning Inspectorate Examination. That appears to abdicate the Council's responsibility for scrutiny of the Local Plan Review. We do not want to be in a position of "last resort" of having to outline flaws to the independent Inspector with the risks of an "unsound" Plan (as identified in your Local Development Scheme June 2019) potentially allowing "free for all" development, when we believe the points can be addressed now before 'Final Plan' stage whilst it is still in the control of your Council.

Q3. Can the Council confirm that the Draft 'Final Plan' has been reviewed against the Council's recently adopted Climate Emergency Policy?

Has the full impact on Climate Change of development in proposed locations been re-assessed? In particular rural locations where, public transport is very limited, resulting in increased vehicular use to reach employment and key services – doctors, dentists, hospitals etc.

Q4. Housing Supply - With the progress of the Ironbridge Power Station redevelopment will the 1000 homes proposed now be included into the Housing Supply figures against the “High Growth” Target 28,750 homes? The potential from this strategic site has, until now, been excluded from future housing supply calculations as it was unclear whether it would be delivered within the plan period to 2036. Whilst there is still considerable site clearance and remediation to be undertaken it is clear that this site redevelopment is moving forward to delivery within that time frame. This supply would relieve “number pressure” on less sustainable locations across the county.

Q5 Housing Needs in support of Economic Growth – will the highly ambitious economic growth aims be reviewed in view of the imminent Brexit with associated impacts on investment and immigration; and the current hold on HS2 which will, at the very least, delay commencement until the end of the Local Plan Review period 2036?

The “High Growth” Target 28,750 homes at 15% over and above the Full and Objective Housing Needs Assessment (FOAHN) was set to support the highly ambitious Economic Growth Strategy. This increases the risk of future “under supply” against annual targets due to market demands outside the control of the Council at any time until 2036 – with the risk of an “out of date” Plan potentially allowing “free for all” development anywhere in the county as in 2014/15.

Response from Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning

- 1. Plans for the resourcing of the team were in place prior to any agreement for the Climate Change role being filled by the Planning Policy and Strategy Manager. The Local Plan Review is a key priority for this Council. The role of Planning Policy and Strategy Manager has been filled by one of our experienced Principal Planning Policy Officers on an interim basis and arrangements have been put in place for additional temporary resources and expertise to support the work that is required to be completed.*
- 2. Shropshire Council’s Cabinet will consider the contents of the draft Final Plan, where officers will seek approval to progress to the statutory six-week consultation on the ‘soundness’ of the Plan in the spring 2020. Following this consultation, the Council has an opportunity to consider responses and to propose a schedule of minor modifications to the Local Plan. The Local Plan, along with any minor modifications will then be subject to consideration by Full Council in summer 2020, where officers will seek approval for the Local Plan to be submitted to the Government for Examination. Therefore, both Cabinet and Full Council have an opportunity to scrutinize the contents of the Local Plan ahead of its submission to Government.*

3. *The emerging Climate Change Strategy is being prepared to support the Council's overall response to the declared Climate Emergency. This Strategy will be considered as part of the emerging Local Plan, both in terms of the overall distribution of development and design standards of new build development. It should however be noted that the Local Plan's preparation up to this point has already been heavily influenced by the need to ensure a sustainable pattern of development, focussing the majority of new proposals into 'higher level' towns, whilst ensuring necessary rural development is focussed into the most sustainable locations by taking account of the ability for communities to access basic services and facilities locally.*
4. *The Local Plan Review has not made a discount allowance for non-delivery on the substantial amount of currently committed sites in Shropshire's main towns over the plan period. The likely future housing supply from the former Ironbridge Power Station site is therefore important as a counter to any future non-delivery on these sites in order to give the council's housing land supply further resilience. The recent progress with the former Ironbridge Power Station site is encouraging, however it should be noted this site continues to be subject to Planning approval.*
5. *The Economic Growth Strategy 2017-21 is an agreed strategy of Shropshire Council and its partners. It is subject to monitoring and review including through Place Overview Committee. The purpose of our Strategy is to make the step change needed in Shropshire's economic productivity and to grow the local economy. This has not changed. Brexit and HS2 are both significant, there is no doubt about this, but the Council has been doing a number of things to understand local impacts related to both of these and decisions that are made by Central Government about them. Indeed, both are referenced in the existing document published in September 2017. There has been a Brexit member task and finish group which has reported through Place Overview Committee and there is a significant amount of work being undertaken at officer level. The housing requirement in the Economic Growth Strategy is set at 1,375 new homes per annum, in line with average annual housing requirement established in Shropshire's adopted Core Strategy, however Shropshire has exceeded this requirement for the last 3 years consecutively since 2016/17.*