

CABINET 5 OCTOBER 2020

MEMBER QUESTIONS

1. Question from Cllr David Turner

The Cabinet agenda item 13 seeks support for a draft response to the Government's White Paper "Planning for the Future".

Developers frequently cite a time-consuming and challenging planning system as the reason for non-delivery of much-needed open market house-building, for under-provision of affordable housing, and for negotiating down Community Infrastructure Levy and s106 contributions.

I am a capitalist – and I'm firm believer in markets. But I also have a duty as a representative of my residents to ensure that their voice is heard and that they can access good quality homes across a range of tenures. Whilst not perfect, we have a planning regime that works, although not as swiftly as some would like. Whatever they may say, housebuilders' primary responsibility is to their shareholder, not their customers. So, if they're able to catch the ear of ministers, they will endeavour to cut out the time-consuming and expensive part of their product delivery. Why wouldn't they?

There were reports a few years ago that over 600,000 house plots were in the largest housebuilders' landbanks. Spurred by this, I've looked at the pre-Covid financial results for 2019 of three of the UK's largest housebuilders and found some interesting facts.

- The first had a short term landbank of 76k plots, and a strategic land pipeline of 127k plots. They claim 15,520 legal completions in the year
- The second had a landbank of 80k plots and announced 17,111 legal completions for the year
- The third had a landbank of 93k plots, and what they describe as "total visibility" of no fewer than 137k plots. And they announced a mere 15,855 legal completions. Maybe not surprisingly this third company had a significantly higher gross margin than the other two.

There is a school of thought that the national housebuilders build homes at a pace that allows them to maximise their profit – the third example I quoted appears to firmly underpin that hypothesis.

So, to remove some of the all-important local input, scrutiny and insight from the planning process as postulated in the White Paper seems likely to ensure that we have a housing market which suits shareholders rather better than the residents of Shropshire.

Does the Portfolio Holder therefore agree that, whilst the Minister's intentions are good, we should be apprehensive about unintended consequences?

And can I be assured that a critical eye is cast over the Council's response to the White Paper consultation at item 13 to ensure that democratic involvement in the planning system locally is not diluted?

Response provided by: Cllr Rob Macey, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning

The Council's draft response to the Government's White Paper: Planning for the Future to be considered by Cabinet today is comprehensive and set out in the Appendix to the report.

While a number of the proposals are transformational and progressive such as:

- a move to leaner processes and data driven solutions for applicants and stakeholders
- a drive to raise design quality for new housing,
- more emphasis on meeting the challenge of climate change,
- community engagement in the production of area design codes

the underlying assumptions for other proposals could be more challenging for Shropshire such as:-

- the proposed new standardised methodology for calculating housing requirement,
- changes to the way local plans are produced and the timing for this,
- the concept of automatic planning permission in "growth areas" and potential impacts on stakeholder engagement
- proposals to reduce the flexibility to agree determination times with applicants for planning applications
- changes to the way infrastructure contributions are made through a new levy where payments would only be received on completion rather than commencement of a project.

Cabinet will give due consideration to the report and its recommended responses on behalf of Shropshire Council.

2. Questions from Cllr David Vasmer

Questions from Councillor David Vasmer (attending)

i) Why was there no consultation with Shrewsbury Town Council, Members or representatives of areas outside Shrewsbury about plans to develop Shrewsbury's Park and Ride Service before it was announced in a press release?

**Response: Cllr Peter Nutting, Leader, on behalf of Cllr Steve Davenport
Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport**

The report to Cabinet today is seeking a mandate of a high level principle to allow officers to begin that very engagement with key stakeholders to develop proposals further, with a view to bringing a more detailed report to Cabinet at a later date.

(ii) What are your plans for Ludlow's Park and Ride site and connecting bus service?

**Response: Cllr Peter Nutting, Leader, on behalf of Cllr Steve Davenport
Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport**

There are no current plans for Ludlow's Park & Ride site and connecting bus service although it is recognised that an overall movement strategy for the town needs to be considered as part of the wider developments recently approved in the town.

(iii) Following the unanimous adoption of the Government's LTN 1/20 standards for the building of cycle infrastructure in Shropshire at the Council meeting on 24th September, what actions or training will be undertaken to ensure that officers and relevant WSP staff have full knowledge of the new standards, will Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package (SITP) works be revised to incorporate these standards and when can we expect a project to be put forward by Shropshire which is fully compliant with the Government's new standards?

**Response: T Cllr Peter Nutting, Leader, on behalf of Cllr Steve Davenport
Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport**

A workshop is planned for Council and WSP staff to brief them on the new standards. Where appropriate staff will be considered for further formal training to ensure that skills and knowledge meet the required levels. SITIP is nearly complete and there are no plans to retrospectively apply the new standards to existing works at this time. Any new project will be required to take into account LTN/120 hence the need for wider training, internal debate and bringing forward of a new Active Travel Plan and linking this into LTP4 that is being developed.