

Questions for Cabinet meeting on 11th March 2021, submitted by Charles Green acting for CPRE Shropshire, about the Update to the Preparation Timetable for the Local Plan

1. The timetable now tabled has been updated from the subsequently corrected one presented to Cabinet on 7 December 2020. Its first 12 pages have been re-dated to March 2021, including the timetable/Preparation Programme itself on page 12. However, the remaining pages, including the updated page 14, continue to be dated December 2020. Will this be corrected on the finally published version?
2. The top line of the Preparation Programme on page 12 incorrectly shows the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) as having been published in both December 2019 and December 2020. It appears on the Preparation Programme because it is a Key monitoring document and it was also said to be a Key document for the Regulation 19 stage of consultation on the Draft Plan. In fact however, no AMR has been published since March 2018 and this important monitoring document is now over three years overdue. Its non-appearance is thought by us and others to be one reason why the Draft Plan may be unsound. Will the Preparation Programme on page 12 be amended to remove this incorrect information? When will the AMR actually be published (it was last promised for “early 2021”) and will this date now be shown correctly on the Preparation Programme?
3. Will the next 5 Year Housing land Supply Statement actually be published later this month, as Programmed?
4. The Preparation Programme shows the Examination stage of the Draft Plan as beginning with the submission of the Draft Plan to the Secretary of State immediately after its approval at Full Council in July 2021, and as ending with the publication of the Inspector’s report in May 2022. Is the Council sure that this is not an over-optimistically short time-frame for the Planning Inspectorate to organise the Examination in Public sessions, to hold them in sufficient detail to address all responses received, and to write up the report after their conclusion?
5. At the previous Regulation 18 Pre-submission Draft stage of consultation the Council received about 5,300 responses from around 2,500 unique respondents. The Summary of Responses was published shortly before 7 December 2020, some two months after the consultation closed. It listed all responses in some detail, but did not contain any report to indicate how those responses had been taken into account in moving to the Regulation 19 stage, although several significant changes were in fact made to the earlier draft. How many responses, from how many unique respondents did the Council receive at the Regulation 19 Pre-submission Draft stage of consultation? Is the Council sure that it has allowed enough time, before taking the Final Draft Plan to Cabinet, then to Full Council in July 2021, to adequately assess all these responses and to ensure that sufficient amendments are made to make the submitted version of the plan sound?
6. We recognise the huge effort made by the limited number of officers involved, particularly under the Covid19 restrictions, in getting the Draft Plan to its current stage of completion. Some aspects of this work, for example those referred to in questions 1 and 2 above, do indicate that pressure of work and lack of resources have led to documentation having been hurriedly put together, not properly checked or not produced at all. Will steps be taken to ensure that the Planning Policy team is adequately resourced as the Plan moves into its Examination in Public phase, in order to maintain the high standards aspired to by Shropshire Council?