

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

14 July 2020

Question from Cllr Nick Murry

Agenda Items 8 – Update on Councils Response to the Climate Emergency

To Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning, Development Management and Property;

Statement

There is no need to rehearse the reasons for the Council needing and committing to action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the light of climate change, which is predicted to have far greater human and economic cost than the current covid crisis.

However, the Council needs to be consistent in its approach and to fully consider the impact of all its significant activities, investments and influences (e.g. via policies) upon climate and the environment. The value of asking residents to make 'green pledges' is greatly undermined if at the same time, the Council promotes unsustainable settlements (e.g. further embedding out-commuting) in its Local Plan, road schemes that will generate more car dependency and plans to sell irreplaceable agricultural assets (e.g. county farms) that sequester carbon and are needed for future local food production.

There therefore needs to be a mechanism to ensure that high level plans, policies and investments are as low carbon as possible, and do not result in more (lifetime) greenhouse gas emissions than the Council is avoiding through its investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

This would need to be up-front and at the earliest stages at which proposals are put forward, so as to avoid unnecessary expenditure of time and resources and prevent the council locking itself into potentially climate damaging schemes. It would include all significant plans, programmes, policies, investments and grant applications.

As a result, members and officers will be able to make better decisions, potentially climate damaging decisions will be avoided and the public will have a clearer picture of the full (net) impact the council is having on mitigating climate change, providing transparency, accountability and additional confidence in what the council is doing.

Question:

As a starting point, will the Cabinet commit in principle to introducing such a mechanism in order to provide transparency about the impact of all significant proposals on the climate (i.e. in terms of their predicted greenhouse gas emissions) at the earliest possible stage?

(please include 'Yes' or 'No' at the start of the answer)

(Should the answer be 'No' please explain why it thinks this is not a sensible and right thing to do)

Response:

Cabinet already considers the environment and climate change implications of all its decisions through the checklist process. The council will also be developing a carbon reduction strategy which will consider areas such as procurement and the council's influence on land use as a landowner.

The council in preparing its Local Plan, will do so in line with Government policy and legislation that has sustainable development at its core and must demonstrate that its policies ensure that the development and use of land contributes to the mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Against this backdrop we fully intend to develop a plan that is as low carbon as possible. There are mechanisms within the plan making process that enable us to do this, for example the use of Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment to test our policies and proposals; the consultation processes to engage with the public and interested stakeholders to gather their views and challenge our thinking; and the preparation of evidence to demonstrate that our policies and proposals are deliverable and sound.

In the light of the council's declaration and legislative framework that guides plan making, the challenge for the emerging Local Plan will be to go further than the current plan and take more steps towards reducing both 'operational' and 'embodied' carbon in all new developments. This can and will be achieved through policy interventions including: a fabric first approach in the construction of new developments; incorporating renewable energy facilities into new developments to break the reliance on gas systems; creating opportunities for retrofitting existing building stock and so on. But the council cannot act alone in delivering this; the development industry and wider stakeholders will also be key in the carbon reduction journey.