

**Wiltshire Council
Cabinet**

11 July 2023

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Questions from: Dave Yearsley – West Wilts Ramblers

To: Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding

Statement

West Wilts Ramblers Work Party was established in January 1976 and with Council leadership established a pattern of working on most Tuesdays. Unfortunately, because of staff shortage and budgets the Councils Countryside Access abruptly stopped weekly leadership and initially would only guarantee once a month. A consequence, of inadequate computer systems was that volunteers could not look on-line for possible tasks or organise via Council systems.

Despite repeated requests, since 2020 by the Wiltshire and Swindon Ramblers and the Countryside Access Forum, MyWilts reports for Rights of Way are not in the public domain. Council staff have naively said it is private data and made no effort to share that which is public. My MP, Danny Kruger has said 'Looking forward to seeing what can be done to emulate Somerset' where Rights of Way Reports and progress to resolution are publicly shared.

Hopefully, the integrated asset management IT system (HIAMS), used by the Council, will support hyper local volunteering, where a volunteer or a group could adopt a countryside asset like a stile, short length of path or road verge, statue, bench and be automatically informed of maintenance need. HIAMS is designed for complex road management and might not cope with occasional volunteers, ad hoc events, and other community matters. HIAMS in isolation, not linked to other systems could be a cull de sac.

Currently, the Wiltshire Citizen ID account does not support "self-volunteering" or showing differing rights and responsibilities within Council data systems in particular for specialist areas, e.g. cleaning a statue, cutting brambles back from a stile, helping in library, community gardening, litter picking, getting shopping for a neighbour, being a friend, etc.

Question 1 (23-55)

Regarding "self-volunteering" (Volunteer - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)) - Should the Council commission a Community database in the public domain, which interfaces with relevant Council systems, lists different activities, events, organisations, tasks and for which volunteers can register and be praised for?

According to ChatGPT, “Such a database could help volunteers find opportunities to contribute to their community and get recognition for their work. It could also help the council manage its resources more effectively and engage with its citizens more efficiently.”

Response

We recognize the valuable contribution that volunteers provide across the breadth of services provided to the communities in Wiltshire. The council is committed to working in partnership with voluntary groups to support and improve the delivery of services.

The development of our integrated management system and its use in connection with Public Rights of Way will provide opportunities to improve engagement with volunteers. With regards to linking a database for volunteering to this system, it is a possibility, but currently other aspects of development will take precedence prior to exploring this avenue.

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Agenda Item 9 – Wiltshire Local Plan Review

Questions from: Richard Curr

**To: Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Development Management and Strategic Planning**

Statement

Cllr Nick Botterill has stated:

"This is all evidence-led - we're not putting any uplifts in either. In the past there were views we needed to have more than the minimum, we're [now] saying we'll build what we need and no more."

Question 2 (23-56)

Can you please explain why the number of houses required is 2090 but the area proposed is for 2525 houses. This surely is an uplift of over 20%!

Response

There is no uplift. The Plan proposes an urban extension to the south of Pewsham, Chippenham that is allocated for approximately 2,525 homes. That figure derives from formulating a site area that has a logical boundary and the right infrastructure to support it. But only a proportion of the site will be built by the end of the plan period, because of construction lead in times and rates of house sales; which will be less than 2,090.

More than three thousand of the homes needed over the plan are already committed with planning permission or in existing plan allocations. Overall, we estimate that the number of homes delivered over the plan period will correspond to the scale of growth set by the plan for Chippenham of 5,850 homes.

Planning for housing is not an exact science and sufficient sites need to be within the supply to ensure the overall level can be met.

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Agenda Item 9 – Wiltshire Local Plan Review

Questions from: Nick Parry

**To: Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader and Cabinet Member for
Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration,
Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing**

**Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Development Management and Strategic Planning**

Statement

Council bias over Chippenham allocation.

As Wiltshire Council have spent vast sums of our money promoting this site and Richard Clewer stated the Local Plan was an independent process perhaps we should question why the most suitable sites were not progressed? Chippenham has been here before at the last site allocation plan where it took Wiltshire Council 3 attempts over several years to get a plan approved all at the council tax payers expense. It appears you have learnt nothing from this previous disaster.

It is abundantly clear to any sensible person that the Council's funding and liabilities have affected this outcome and should not be allowed.

Clearly from the start (Hif bid and "Future Chippenham" where housing required figures were adjusted) to the finish (this draft plan) Wiltshire Council has acted unscrupulously.

Given that the following statements are hidden in the appendix documents and not made clear in the Local Plan draft please clarify :

Question 3 (23-57)

"Vehicular access is possible from the A4 and the A350 at the Lackham roundabout. A bridge over the River Avon and floodplain is required. **The delivery of the road will be phased** and the phasing for the delivery of the development including housing and employment land will have to take this into account."

Response

Policy 7 'Land South of Chippenham and East of Showell Farm' requires a single comprehensive masterplan, phasing and delivery strategy to be prepared for the site to be approved by the council as local planning authority prior to planning applications being submitted. This will be informed by a transport assessment that will identify trigger points for the delivery of transportation infrastructure, alongside consideration of matters including site design and layout. The assessment will identify a trigger based on the predicted effects on the local transport network of the build out of new homes.

Question 4 (23-58)

"The development is of such a scale that local constraints are varied and widespread and will include capacity insufficiencies in the Town Centre and onto the Principal Road network."

Response

As with any development there will be impacts. This quote highlights one of the negative effects of this development without mitigation, but the preamble to the text recognises that the effects can be mitigated.

Question 5 (23-59)

"Traffic from new development in this location would feed into the network of roads that goes through Chippenham, Calne, Corsham and Bradford on Avon, with potential to further contribute to elevation of emissions"

Response

See response to Question 4.

Statement

The projected costs for this river crossings spanning in excess of 400 meters has been hidden from the public domain but were so large that the HIF bid was withdrawn by your Council, therefore I am sure it would be in excess of £100 million circa £48,000 for each of the planned 2090 houses.

Question 6 (23-60)

Could you please inform the public at what point the planned river crossings would be delivered?

Response

See response to Question 3.

Question 7 (23-61)

At what estimated cost which I am sure should be a consideration for the population of the town and also the county, not just your Council cabal?

Response

See response to Questions 8 and 9. None of the population of the town or County will contribute to the cost of the scheme.

Question 8 (23-62)

Who is going to pay?

Response

The proposal is no different to other proposals in the draft Plan. The cost of constructing a river bridge, like other infrastructure, is borne by the developers and landowners from the development value of the scheme.

Question 9 (23-63)

Please confirm that this funding would be in place before commencement of any building?

Response

See response to Question 8. This is no different to other proposals of the draft Plan, funding for infrastructure is arranged by the developer and costs recouped from the value of house and land sales over time.

Question 10 (23-64)

Why has your Council and planning department totally ignored the overwhelming rejection by the local population of Chippenham to this Southern scheme and all the unnecessary infrastructure, extortionate costs and desecration of habitat involved.

Response

The Council has not ignored local concerns and continues to address them in progressing the plan.

A site allocation south of Pewsham has been selected having considered the other options available at the town to ensure that sufficient site allocations are identified to meet level of housing to be planned for the Town over the period to 2038.

Much of the infrastructure necessary to support the development will have wider benefit, which as stated in response to 9 won't be at cost to the Council, the

population of the town or County. Development is required to deliver biodiversity net gain not a loss.

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Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Questions from: Colin Gale – Chairman Rushall Parish Council

To: Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding

Statement

Background:

In April this year I reported to the Area Manager Highways North that the footway Unilog bank retention in Rushall was rotten with retention stakes falling out and the bank was in danger of collapsing. I subsequently provided pictures of the failed bank retention. The initial response by the Area Manager was that he would arrange for the highways contractor to inspect the bank retention and provide a repair scheme with costings. Several contractors subsequently visited the site and reported that the complete section of bank retention was beyond repair and the whole length of bank



retention required replacing. It should be noted that each time a contractor visited the site more logs appeared on the bank where they had been dislodged by the inspection.

This stretch of footway links pedestrians to the Rushall Forest School, North Newnton and the River Avon Public Footpath and is in regular use.

In June I chased a response from the Highways Manager and received the following from the Highways Engineer:

“As you are aware we have had several contractors look at the Unilog fencing, with the intention to repair the damaged section of timber. Regrettably, this is something that will not be feasible and the complete length of Unilog fencing would need to be replaced. On inspection the bank is currently stable behind the Unilog and the missing section. Therefore, to fully replace the Unilog fence would not be a priority.

We are currently focusing on our statutory duties rather than discretionary works. We will continue to monitor the condition of the Unilog and the bank behind.”

Question 11 (23-65)

I have looked at the Wiltshire Council Highways Inspection Manual which does cover this kind of footway defect under the ‘Description – Footway obstructions or defects

that present danger to the public'. Clearly the impending collapse of the bank in the areas where there is no retention presents an early danger to the public. The Inspection Manual categorises this defect as a 'Priority 1' therefore I cannot understand on what basis the Highways Engineer has not given the work any level of priority. Please can WC advise the priority and timescale for this bank retention to be replaced noting that as soon as a wet period arrives land slippage is likely to occur?

Response

The Wiltshire Highways Inspection Manual sets out the intervention levels that we work to when responding to defects within the highway. Page 13 and Page 26 of this document provide the most relevant defect type, classed as obstructions. The failed section of wall has been cleared from the footway so the obstruction has been removed, alleviating the hazard.

Question 12 (23-66)

I believe that Wiltshire Council have a statutory duty to maintain the roads and footways, please can you advise what is discretionary about this requirement?

Response

As the Highway Authority Wiltshire Council does have a statutory duty to maintain the public highway.

With regards to the unilog retaining structure, it's condition has deteriorated, however, as stated within the Area Highways Managers correspondence the bank is currently stable but will be monitored for any movement.

While there is no immediate work planned, further options are being considered on how to remedy the problem.

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Agenda Item 9 – Wiltshire Local Plan Review

Questions from: Hannah Anderson-Jones - on behalf of Bloor Homes and L & Q Estates

To: Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning

Question 13 (23-67)

Draft Policy 3 states that Chippenham, Melksham and Trowbridge are identified as broad locations for growth, where additional urban extensions will be identified towards the end of the Plan period. But if these additional areas are identified as sustainable locations for growth and additional sites will be required to be identified in the plan period, why are the Council not planning positively for them now and coordinating infrastructure delivery from the outset?

Response

The Council is planning positively to ensure a sufficient rate and scale of additional new homes; and is doing so without an immediate need to rely on future urban extensions at Chippenham, Melksham or Trowbridge. This positive approach is underlined by a commitment to further work on broad locations for growth that can ensure supply beyond the plan period recognising the lengthy time scales and lead in times these propositions will involve.

Question 14 (23-68)

With the intention of maintaining Chippenham as the Principal Settlement for growth in the Local Plan Review, does the limited quantum of development to be proposed following the loss of a major site in the strategy due to the infrastructure delivery issue not warrant firmer consideration of alternative/additional deliverable options in this Principal Settlement, especially given that (as per our previous question) additional urban extensions will be required at this location for growth during the plan period?

Response

The scale of growth proposed at Chippenham of 5,850 over the plan period is not a 'limited quantum'. Sufficient land is already committed, supplemented by an urban extension south of Pewsham, so additional allocations are not warranted.

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Agenda Item 9 – Wiltshire Local Plan Review

Questions from: Richard Walker on behalf of Tom Oatley – Paxcroft Farm

**To: Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Development Management and Strategic Planning**

Statement (23-69)

The Oatleys and Pikes are long established Trowbridge families and landowners to the North of Trowbridge. We host valued business space; our land already generates 10MW of renewable energy and we have enabled the relocation of Trowbridge Rugby Club to its current home. We are genuinely concerned about the future of our town and want to leave a lasting positive legacy. We know that additional community facilities and infrastructure must be at the heart of the success of the strategy for the town.

During the preparation of the Local Plan, Lightwood representing sites 5 and 6 and acting on behalf of the landowners, presented a comprehensive planning solution to the Council. This was prepared by Nicholas Boys Smith of the Building Beautiful Commission; Nicholas is now Chair of the Office for Place. The landowners' commitment statement ran through his brief, which stated;

"We are 'of Trowbridge' and if change is to happen, and we are to be a part of that, we want to see things done properly and the achievement of the delivery for wider benefits, early in the development process. We are focused on legacy and a deliverable plan".

We feel the proposed draft Plan undermines optimal planning. It appears that the Council clearly knows the long-term vision for the area, but that it has fallen short of being fully transparent with its intentions. We believe that detailing the full essential contextual framework for Trowbridge will assist us in releasing the right land at the right time, enabling and safeguarding key infrastructure (education) and community benefits in the right places early in the process. This will ensure the long-term vision is not compromised from its inception.

We welcome further engagement to ensure we can work as long-term strategic partners and deliver great outcomes.

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Agenda Item 9 – Wiltshire Local Plan Review

Questions from: Andrew Nicolson – Chair Wiltshire Climate Alliance

**To: Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Development Management and Strategic Planning**

Question 15 (23-70)

- a) The Anthesis reports set the parameters for the Council's climate emergency delivery plan. (i) Does the draft Plan make extensive reference to, and adopt the measures in, the Anthesis report on a path to Net Zero for the county, and if so, in which sections or topic areas?
- b) In which topic areas, e.g. transport, housing, energy, land use, waste, economy, does the draft plan diverge or fall short most, from the recommendations in the Anthesis report?

Response

The draft Plan has been published as part of the agenda papers. It contributes to the objectives and outcomes relating to the implementation of the council's Climate Strategy. The evidence in the Anthesis report has been taken into consideration in the drafting of the Plan and it will also feed into the emerging Local Transport Plan.

Climate change is embedded into the Vision and objectives of the draft Plan, which goes much further than the current Wiltshire Core Strategy (see new Policy 4 'Addressing Climate Change').

Question 16 (23-71)

- a) Noting that, as the draft Plan will have been prepared before the UK Climate Change Committee's 28 June release of its latest report, which identifies that central government's net zero targets are being missed on many fronts, it is likely that Wiltshire Council's contributions also fall short, will Cabinet encourage and be receptive to consultation responses advocating that the Plan is strengthened in policy areas that contribute to Net Zero for 2030 and beyond, and is amended in policy proposals that move the county, its economy and community away from that path?

- b) Noting that Cllr Clewer stated, alongside Tracy Brabin (mayor of West Yorkshire CA) on 11 July 2022, "*As co-presidents of UK100 – the UK's only network of climate-ambitious local leaders committed to net zero – we both passionately believe only local leaders have the insight, power and influence to bring about the changes needed*". Is Cabinet willing to lead from the front by supporting policies, including consultation proposals, that are ahead of public opinion, e.g. on house construction standards, road traffic reduction, solar and wind energy, reforestation, and livestock greenhouse gases, in order to raise Wiltshire's locally determine contribution to mitigating the climate emergency?

Response

The plan is forward thinking and will help to deliver the council's climate change ambitions. It takes into account best practice and includes land use planning policies designed to deliver net zero carbon developments ahead of anticipated legislation, a minimum biodiversity net gain of 20%, tree planting and active travel. Sustainable development is a thread that runs through the plan. The Plan needs to accord with national planning policy and be viable and deliverable.

It is important to make progress with the draft Plan to ensure that we have in place up to date policies as soon as possible and can set standards for new development that support Wiltshire's progress towards net zero.

As explained in the report, the draft Plan will be subject to consultation, once the outcome has been considered, a report will be brought back to Cabinet in order that the Plan can be approved for submission to commence the examination stage. All comments received will be independently examined by an appointed Planning Inspector on issues of soundness and legal compliance.