

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

17 September 2019

Questions from Extinction Rebellion

To Councillor Richard Clewer – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and MCI

Originally supplementary questions from Environment Committee meeting 3rd September 2019

The questions below, developed by members of the public, were originally intended for the Environment Committee. At that meeting we were told that they were more appropriate to the Cabinet and so we are submitting them to you for the meeting of 17th September.

Note, the original questions and answers were included in the “Public Pack, Supplement 2” of Environment Select Committee of 3rd September 2019. We have not included these to avoid a long document.

A number of us will not be able to attend but we would appreciate answers to all the questions

Question 1:

Bill Jarvis

Commitment to 2030

Your response states ***“the council will seek to make Wiltshire Council’s administrative area carbon neutral by 2030”***

This is very different from the original February resolution which stated the Council would (Item 2) ***“Seek to make the County of Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030”***

Please confirm that this will remain your commitment.

We suggest that to avoid ambiguity and to make it clear the Council is only responsible for the County of Wiltshire, the text is changed slightly to **“Seek to make the County of Wiltshire, excluding the Borough of Swindon, carbon neutral by 2030”**

We would appreciate it if a press announcement was made confirming your commitment to the whole county becoming carbon neutral by 2030

Response:

It remains our commitment to seek to make the county of Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030. The proposed terms of reference of the Global Warming and Climate Emergency Task Group were reported to Environment Select Committee on 3 September and included

1. Develop recommendations and a plan to seek to achieve the target of making the county of Wiltshire, excluding the area administered by Swindon Borough Council, net carbon neutral by 2030.

Question 2:

Lucy Vigar

Commitment to Tree planting in the County and % of Government target fulfilled by Wiltshire Council

We see no reason that this question should have been passed to Highways.

The question directly relates to carbon sequestration and the Council’s commitments. The Climate Emergency Task Group working group, “Land Use” is the team to address this question, not Highways and Waste, which has no direct remit yet on carbon sequestration, as far as we know.

Please explain the logic.

Response:

Highways covers a wide range of services including managing the council’s trees, both on and off the highway, so would be best placed to answer your original question. The task group is considering land use as one of its themes but does not have a working group. The members of the task group will work

with the relevant cabinet members and officers to ensure a response is provided to the question asked.

Question 3:

Jeremy Wire and Adrian Temple Brown

Communication with the community, Councillors and Council Officers.

We previously suggested a series of community workshops to inform and gain ideas on things to be done. You then proposed that these be run with the Area Boards. If they are, then they really need to be dedicated events and well advertised. Please advise your plans.

The only Councillor to have positively set up a community meeting is Cllr Oldrieve and we thank him for that.

We wonder why others are not doing it and how the outcomes will be fed back into the Task Group? Will you be carrying out more of these with local communities?

To suggest that a full climate emergency discussion can take place at the full Council meeting is an excellent idea, however it would take the whole meeting and wouldn't include officers and other Council staff who surely need to join in the debate.

A dedicated Council workshop with experts to provide background and proposals would avoid the pressure of other Council business and enable proper open debate. Would you consider this?

We are happy to help facilitate such a workshop.

Response:

A number of the Wiltshire Area Boards are working collaboratively to provide environmental and climate change focussed events over the coming months. Area Boards in Amesbury, Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade, Salisbury and Southern Wiltshire are already scheduled (dates below). These will be dedicated events promoted by the respective Community Engagement Managers and local partners. Many other areas have started the planning process to have similarly themed meetings and events in 2020.

Salisbury: Monday 4 November.

Amesbury: Thursday 21 November

RWB and Cricklade: Wednesday 27 November

Southern Wiltshire: Thursday 28 November

Climate Change is an agenda item on the Area Board Chairs Meeting on the 16 September 2019. Councillor Wright as chair of the Global Warming and Climate Emergency Task Group will brief the chairs of the Area Boards and discuss how communities could be engaged in carbon reduction across the county through Area Boards.

Question 4:

Sarah Prinsloo

Public lands sale. Why, in an emergency sell Council land that could deliver carbon benefits to the County

We are in an EMERGENCY. Selling the family silver (trading land) will absolutely take away assets vital for climate mitigation.

It may even be that the Council needs to acquire land to support climate mitigation measures such as you mention.

Please reconsider this issue.

Carbon footprint from housing

This question is not answered at all and so we repeat it here.

Will the Council confirm that in calculating the carbon footprint for the County, it will include construction emissions, which account on average for 50% of a buildings lifetime Carbon emissions?

Can the council also please address how it will manage to achieve net zero in light of this, including plans to repurpose old buildings, rather than demolishing and rebuilding.

Do you know what the likely carbon footprint of your future developments is going to be?

Response:

Public Land Sale

As stated previously, the council has a programme of asset disposals to generate capital receipts to help finance council services. Therefore, we cannot give an assurance that we will not dispose of public land in the future as that could jeopardise the council's ability to deliver services to the people of Wiltshire. However, council officers will imminently be bringing forward proposals where use of council land to generate renewable energy not only address that issue but will also provide a return from the asset comparable to that which could be achieved from a sale. The council will consider carbon mitigating measures on its land which may not generate a financial return such as tree planting, and would be keen to work with the communities in Wiltshire to see how that could be achieved.

Carbon Footprint from Housing

As previously stated, the council's control of development in Wiltshire is achieved through the Development Plan i.e. the Local Plan and any 'made' Neighbourhood Plans and their planning policies in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance. The Local Plan update will include the most recent changes to guidance that require development to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain and hence to further demonstrate that development will be carried out in the most sustainable way. It will be difficult to know the likely carbon footprint of future developments until the developments come forward. The Local Plan can also implement policies to make developers more energy sustainable subject to approval by a Planning Inspector.

The council intends to develop an ambitious council house build programme over the next ten years to help meet the affordable housing needs of Wiltshire. As part of that plan our ambition is to seek to achieve carbon neutral development where possible and economic. We are in the process of researching that in the light of our development opportunities. The programme will include the purchase of some existing dwellings which will then be refurbished to improve the carbon footprint. The council will seek to replace heating systems in its council housing with more efficient systems to reduce the carbon footprint but also to allow its customers to run their homes at reduced cost. In addition, the council will be developing a programme to increase the production of renewal energy from its estate, increase insulation and reduce water usage again to reduce its carbon footprint.

Question 5a:

Elizabeth Roberts -further questions

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in February; why have emergency powers not been put in place to make this issue the absolute priority for all Council departments and business?

Response:

The Council as a unitary authority provides over 230 public services for the residents of Wiltshire within the county of Wiltshire excluding the area administered by Swindon Borough Council. The Council by its resolution in February 2019 acknowledged that there is a 'climate emergency' and confirmed that the Council would seek carbon neutrality by 2030. By this resolution the Council identified to all Council departments and services the pressing need to secure change to its residents to avoid the consequences of climate change.

Having regard to the fact that the pressing need has been communicated and is being actioned and to the fact that the Council also faces other pressing needs within the services the Council sees no basis, at this stage, to elevate this pressing need to use of the exercise of emergency powers.

Question 5b:

Given the predictions by scientists relating to a likelihood of mass crop failure on a global scale due to a changing climate, what are the Council's plans to cope with possible food shortages?

Please could the Council share their Disaster Preparedness Plan and inform us as to whether this has been amended to take into account the Declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Response:

Any response to mass crop failures would be led at a national level by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Defra would work with the entire range of farming, food manufacturing, distribution and retail companies to provide a sustainable food supply. It is likely that Wiltshire Council would be required to coordinate and lead actions at a local level based on national plans.

A copy of the Wiltshire Council Integrated Emergency Management Plan is attached which details our response to emergencies and major incidents. The Plan focuses on the response and recovery phases as well as corporate business continuity. It does not contain specific reference to the Declaration of a Climate Emergency, however some potential outcomes which could result from climate change, e.g. increased flooding and disease outbreaks could provide circumstances where the plan would be enabled. Responses to such outcomes would be managed in line with national and regional plans issued by national agencies such as Defra, the Cabinet Office and the Environment Agency.