

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

3 November 2020

From Ian James

To Councillor Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council

Item 5 – Public Participation

Question 1

As the public understand it the Council is entering into a high risk project with Homes England, there is already strong opposition to the road in the River Marden valley, over 3,000 people have signed a petition against the road. If the Council is successful in being able to draw down funds to construct a road which will allow the Council to build 3,000 council houses, and in addition to allow developers to concrete over farmland to build houses and 1 million sq ft of industrial units.

Why will the Council not make public all the documents pertaining to the bid now that it has been approved by Cabinet, What does Wiltshire Council have to hide and will it now release those documents into the public domain?

Response

The Council will provide information that complies with the requirements set out in the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Question 2

The Council builds the road, but the economic situation is so bad the developers say “no thank you” this is too big a risk for us to build now, we will come back in 5 or 10 years time when the banks may lend money to borrowers, and there will be more people in employment to buy the houses.

Do you think the shareholders of Persimmon Homes and others with billions of pounds in the bank will be happy to bail out Wiltshire Council. No they will wait until they can smell blood, and then come back when the land (our land taxpayers land) is so cheap the Council will have to let it go below market value. This is a scenario as the Cabinet member for Finance may have to consider, it is hypothetical, but it is a risk the Council needs to mitigate. How would the Council deal with a road, but no houses or employment land constructed as often happens in Spain? Wiltshire Council is taking all the risk and the developers zero risk.

The economic situation in the country is so bad children do not have enough to eat, unemployment will soar next year, shops and offices will close, and the Council's income will drop further. Now is the time to be brave and say this is just a “Bridge too Far” and withdraw before the writing on the wall becomes a reality.

If the economic situation does not concern the Council then the rising tide of opposition in Chippenham and from a number of Conservative Councillors should.

Response

The state of the economy will obviously impact on the viability of any development proposals. The grant determination agreement to be agreed with Homes England provides the opportunity to review the agreement in the light of changed economic conditions.