

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

5 January 2021

Agenda Item 5 – Chippenham HIF Consultation

Question from Ian James – Bremhill Parish Council

To Councillor Philip Whitehead – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, MCI and Communications

Statement (21-08)

The residents of the parish of Bremhill parish, and many other residents from Parish Councils in the Chippenham area welcomes the opportunity to make comment on the Plan review starting on 13th January.

Why was this notification to parish councils made so late in the day? Surely the Council knew that a consultation would be due in January when completing the papers for review. This rush to start a consultation process smacks of panic in the ranks of the Cabinet.

Why has the consultation on the Local Plan been brought forward, the advertised date for the consultation for the road options was the 11th January. Was Futures Chippenham not ready?

Confusion reigns not only at Wiltshire Council but also for the public who are confused as to which consultation they will be required to comment on.

Why were Parish Councils only warned of this process on or after the 18th December? This time frame is unreasonable and an abuse of process.

It is the duty of Wiltshire Council to notify the public in good time for a consultation, regardless as to the fact that it is an informal consultation, or that the period has been extended.

Many of the residents in Chippenham and Calne have been denied their democratic right to this consultation.

Apart from the fact that the process of warning residents of this consultation has been a complete shambles, when Spatial Planning was questioned on the difficulty of contacting residents, the reply was "you can email them" Surely it is the responsibility of the Council to publish the dates in places where the public have access to read them not just on the Council web site.

Secondly, and importantly a good number of residents do not use the Internet, or if they do the performance is so poor it is difficult to view or download the documents. What is

the Council going to do to assist those residents that do not have access to the Internet?

Reading the consultation process, it appears an hour has been allocated between 7pm and 8pm. 3,500 people have objected to this road and the development of up to 10,000 houses in the Chippenham area. How is the Council going to accommodate questions from that number of people or even a tenth of that number on Teams?

What the Council officers fail to understand is in order to brief the electorate the only safe way to do this is through the parish newsletter that is printed the month before distribution, by notifying Parishes on the 18th December it was too late to inform them of the pending consultation.

I am afraid Wiltshire Council has a record of sending out publication of consultations over a Christmas period, when many people are away or celebrating Christmas with little time to be checking the Wiltshire web site, any public holiday or even August is a good time so that people miss the opportunity to give their opinion.

As a senior member of the Council and a Cabinet member stated to me and others in a meeting, "Consultation takes too much time"

Consultation done correctly does not take too much time if done correctly the first time.

The correct process for Wiltshire Council is to push the start of the consultation back in order for all people to have an opportunity to comment on this important planning project. The planning process starts at the end of 2021 I would respectfully ask that this consultation is put back until people can attend in person to assess this major building project.

Response

The consultation dates for the Wiltshire Local Plan Review were set to avoid the Christmas period and the start of the new year. Reasonable notification has been provided to people including parish and town councils and the 8 week consultation period, rather than 6 weeks allows sufficient time for people to comment. There is no need to push back the start date.

Like all development plan documents, the Local Plan Review is being carried out in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The statement has been reviewed and amended in response to restrictions required by the COVID-19 pandemic to focus on online methods of communication in line with guidance from the Government and can be viewed via the following link: [Statement of Community Involvement - Wiltshire Council](#). Where people do not have access to the internet, they can contact the Council by telephone and request hard copies of documents.