

Wiltshire Council

Council

25 February 2014

Item 10 - Questions from Councillors

From Councillor Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division

To Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council

Question 8

Where in the Cabinet does responsibility lie for the shortcomings of the Council's draft Core Strategy, and particularly for the disastrous failure to achieve any planning guidance for housing allocations for the Chippenham area?

Response

The Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre- Submission Document was approved by Council on 26th June 2012 and the Spatial Strategy for Chippenham Community Area CP10 is just one of the sixty nine core policies. The delegation for consequential actions are set out in the third part of the minute.

The question pre-empts the outcome of the Examination process which we are still within. The Inspector is yet to publish his findings on the plan. The Inspector has requested that the council reconsider the Chippenham options through a discreet policy document. This is an acceptable part of the public enquiry process. Should the Inspector wish to apply that modification, then the Core Strategy itself will need to be amended to reflect this. The National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance for policy development.

Question 9

Why was there so little Cabinet member, Corporate director, or Service director participation in the hearing of evidence about Chippenham housing allocations at the Core Strategy Enquiry in Public?

Response

An Examination in public is a very technical and complex procedure and we have highly experienced officers to undertake presenting the evidence on behalf of the Council. There was support both from the Service Director and legal advisors throughout the sessions, and the Cabinet member and Corporate Director were kept fully informed. At the pre-hearing meeting, the Inspector requested that member involvement was directed through the Officer team.

Question 10

When I asked a question at Council about your Administration's preparations for the enquiry into the draft Core Strategy, I was assured that the Council had taken advice about its draft plan and was assured that it was robust. Who provided that advice and why was it so inaccurate?

Response

The draft core strategy was sent to Leading Counsel (a QC) to check for soundness before going to Council and the advice received was that it was considered sound. The QC had been advising the Council throughout. As with any hearing the Inspector has to come to his own application of the facts. In this case the Inspector has placed different weight on some of the evidence presented and put weight on the new National Policy framework and is indicating that he is considering a different conclusion to the Council. That does not mean that the original advice or the Council's original position was wrong.

It is of note that the Inspector has not determined that the underlying Core strategy is unsound but has merely asked for Council's comments in respect of proposed modifications to ensure soundness. In fact the Inspector said in his 10th procedural letter: -

"... the matters summarised below are those upon which I am most interested to hear how the Council may wish to proceed. Such matters are not exhaustive of those that will be addressed in my final report albeit many aspects of the plan appear **justified, positively prepared, consistent with national policy and likely to be effective in their implementation.**"

Question 11

Who is overseeing the preparation of the Council's responses to the Inspector's requirements for changes to the draft Core Strategy?

Response

The Core Strategy is still within the Examination period, and is currently the Inspector's process during his consideration of evidence. The Associate Director of Economic Development and Planning is overseeing liaising with the Inspector in conjunction with the Cabinet Member and other professional officers. Cabinet approved the approach being taken on the 21st January.