

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**24 March 2020**

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**Questions from Cllr Nick Murry**

**Agenda Item 13 Future Chippenham Update**

**To Councillor Philip Whitehead Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

**Question 1**

The report states that “the grant will enable the Council to deliver... benefits in traffic congestion and flow across both new and existing road network. This seems to fly in the face of the evidence, which suggests that the additional vehicle movements from 7,500 more houses will create substantially more congestion in the centre of Chippenham than would be diverted by a residential feeder road to the east of the town. **Please could you share the analysis undertaken in the HIF proposal that demonstrates otherwise?**

**Response**

*The Council will be as open and transparent as possible within the parameters of commercial confidentiality. The Council in its role as landowner and promoter of the Future Chippenham scheme is part of a commercially competitive landscape for development options. Separately the Council in its role as LPA will make judgments about the value of different development options put before it by different developers. The Future Chippenham programme will have to present its case and seek to win approval in the same manner and subject to the same rigour and disciplines as every other development option.*

**Question 2**

The report also references “town centre improvements in Chippenham yielding an improved experience for residents and visitors alike,” yet provides no evidence for this. Future administrations could decide to spend future CIL receipts anywhere in the county and would not guarantee investment in Chippenham. **Please could you share the analysis undertaken in the HIF proposal that demonstrates otherwise?**

## **Response**

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## **Question 3**

The report refers to “supporting the Council’s commitment to deliver a carbon neutral future within Wiltshire,” yet provides no explanation as to how creating a substantially larger commuter town would contribute to this goal. The expansion of Chippenham in recent years has resulted in in-migration, massively expanded out-commuting, resulting in congestion, and little benefit for the existing population. These proposals will exacerbate this trend rather than creating a sustainable place where people can live and work and enjoy a good quality of life. **Please could you share the analysis undertaken in the HIF proposal that demonstrates how expanding the town to this degree is sustainable in terms of reducing net carbon emissions?**

## **Response**

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## **Question 4**

Referring again to “supporting the Council’s commitment to deliver a carbon neutral future within Wiltshire,” Wiltshire Council farms would be built upon as part of the HIF proposals. Not only is this farmland valuable as a future resource but it also extremely valuable in terms of its potential for renewable energy generation (solar PV) to offset the town’s current and future emissions. These sites have been found to be economically viable and in terms of grid connection. Using them for this rather than building upon would generate a lucrative rental income for the Council and an

income stream from selling electricity generated on the site, as well as enabling the Council to offset its own emissions more quickly (in line with its plans for carbon neutrality). Since sites like Hardens Farm are on and adjacent to the flood plain (which does not prevent solar) and would be a temporary feature, not removing productive land permanently, this would seem to be a sensible proposition. **Please could you share the analysis undertaken in the HIF proposal that considers this option?**

## **Response**

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## **Question 5**

In 2019 a meeting was held with Wiltshire Council planners at which local councillors were told that Chippenham would need to identify sites for an additional 3,500 houses, whereas the HIF bid proposed an expansion of 7,500 houses on a particular site, without any planning evidence for this number being remotely feasible. This does not seem like a proper planning or democratic process. **Could you explain how it is possible for the HIF bid to predetermine the housing numbers in the Local Plan Review in this way?**

## **Response**

*The Council in its role as landowner and promoter of the Future Chippenham HIF bid is acting in accordance with all current legislative requirements and will continue to do so throughout the process. The Council has been awarded a grant of £75m from MHCLG for Housing Infrastructure Funding. This must be applied specifically to construct infrastructure that enables the delivery of housing to address the County's housing needs over many years to come. The Council is now negotiating terms and conditions with Homes England to sign a contract that will first of all secure the grant for use by the Council and secondly will govern how the grant is used. This process is expected to be complete by the end of 2020, current circumstances permitting*

*There is no predetermination possible in this scenario. It will be an express condition of the contract with Homes England that planning permission must be obtained for both the road to be funded by the HIF grant and subsequently for housing*

*developments as they come forward. The planning process is entirely separate from the Council's team working on the Future Chippenham HIF award, and has governance measures in place to ensure and maintain that separation.*

*Any landowner can make a planning application on any piece of land at any time. They do not have to own it, nor does it have to be in a Core Strategy or Local Plan. MHCLG are aware of the status of the land forming part of the Future Chippenham scheme and are reflecting this in the terms and conditions to which the Council will be expected to commit.*

*When the Future Chippenham scheme does submit its planning applications all normal public consultation and examinations in public will take place as part of that process. The scheme will be subject to every discipline and requirement to which any and every application is subject, and will have to win approval on its own merits.*