

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

24 March 2020

Questions from Andrew Nicolson

Agenda Item 13 Future Chippenham Update

To Councillor Philip Whitehead Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Statement

This is a massive scheme, releasing greenfield land for housing and commercial development on a scale unprecedented in Wiltshire at a time when the Council has only just declared its belated recognition of the global climate and ecological emergency, which is reaching a critical stage. It involves a road that will complete a ring around Chippenham, hence bringing unintended consequences such as increased through traffic on the A350 and new road, further greenfield development pressures, induced traffic generated by the temporary relief of roads within Chippenham, and the decentralisation of the relatively sustainable Chippenham urban area.

Question 1

Does Cabinet accept the need for full transparency and disclosure of information about the scheme, going beyond its minimal legal obligations under Freedom of Information legislation?

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

Will the Council commit to the earliest possible engagement of community stakeholders including the dynamic community groups now coalescing under the Wiltshire Climate Alliance umbrella, and offer positive assistance to an inexperienced generation of campaigners who have the best interests of Wiltshire and the world's future generations at heart?

Response

The Council will not compromise its intention to consult with the public about many aspects of the Future Chippenham programme and that will take place as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

The first such engagement will be to seek review and comment on route options for the road to be funded by the HIF award which we had hoped to commence in late April. As you indicate it will not be possible to hold public events at this point in time. As an alternative we are looking at technological methods to begin the consultation process, to be followed up with appropriate events when it is safe to do so.

As you will know a great many factors must be accounted for in determining the route of a new road from archaeology, ground conditions, engineering options suitability for its intended purpose, among many others. Included in these factors are the views of the public and the Council will only determine a preferred route when the public's views have been received. Once every factor has been considered and a preferred route is available that too will be offered for consultation before being finalised and becoming part of the subsequent planning application.

In connection specifically with the Future Chippenham programme the Council will have to take in to account in depth studies of ecological and climate impacts and will have to put in place all appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures. There will be a role in this for public stakeholder groups which will be determined as we reach the design stage.

Question 3

Will the Council please commission an independent report reviewing the ecological, climate, induced traffic and other unintended consequences of the scheme?

Response

Please see the answer to question 2 above. The investigative and mitigation requirements placed on the Future Chippenham programme will be exacting and stringent if the scheme is to secure its planning permission.