

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

24 March 2020

Statement and Question from Adrian Temple Brown

Agenda Item 13 – Chippenham Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid

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

Statement

I asked a Public Question of Cabinet on 04-Feb-2020. I have received a written response, but as yet I have not received a reply to my Public Question.

This politician technique of ‘divert or avoid’ in response to difficult questions is typical to each and every direct question I have so far posed to Cabinet or Full Council.

Let us consider this Question and Answer as a typical example:

Question: Will the Cabinet move Urgently to force a line item to be added to the HiF programme’s Project Plan that *requires* the Carbon Costs associated with building out to be reasonably estimated using your Detailed Development model ? (These are the Carbon costs associated with building out the full Chippenham Eastern Expansion - an example of a development over Wiltshire countryside?)

Answer:

The Council has declared a climate emergency and set an ambitious target of becoming a carbon neutral county by 2030. To achieve carbon neutrality the council will, among other things, need to account for carbon in its development plans. The council will also look at ways of delivering new development with reduced carbon emissions and will investigate offsetting any residual carbon emissions, so that the net input into the atmosphere is as close to zero carbon emissions as possible.

The answer needs to be Yes or No (and of course, any text following the answer is absolutely fine).

However, there is no Yes or No to the Direct Question in the considered and written response from Cabinet.

To the Officer present overseeing Scrutiny and Democracy, I would like to ask the following question:

“Is Cabinet *not* answering a Direct Public Question actually allowed?”

Note: The following question was asked after the Cabinet meeting on 4 February 2020, and a response was sent to Mr Temple-Brown. Mr Temple-Brown has subsequently indicated that he did not feel that the response answered his question adequately. An additional response is provided below.

Question 2

I understand that the Cabinet does not want to challenge the Government’s legal policy of UK GDP growth at this time on environmental grounds and I understand the possible dire consequences of doing so. However, it is clear that you are proceeding with significant Road and House building on fields and woods in Wiltshire, without having any idea at all of the absolute Carbon Cost of construction, nor the absolute Carbon Cost of new residents & businesses ‘living life’ in the proposed development.

Will the Cabinet therefore move Urgently to force a line item to added to the programme’s Project Plan (I understand this is overseen by Christine Lamb) that requires the Carbon Costs associated with building out the full Chippenham Eastern Expansion (as a mature example of a Wiltshire countryside development) using your detailed development model to be reasonably estimated ?

As Shakespeare said and in relation to treating Wildlife and Countryside as a business resource “you know what you do”

Response

The Council has declared a climate emergency and set an ambitious target of becoming a carbon neutral county by 2030. To achieve carbon neutrality the council will, among other things, need to account for carbon in its development plans. The council will also look at ways of delivering new development with reduced carbon emissions and will investigate offsetting any residual carbon emissions, so that the net input into the atmosphere is as close to zero carbon emissions as possible.

A programme such as Future Chippenham is the ideal long term enterprise in which we can develop initiatives that demonstrate our commitment to these aspects of development. We will publish as much as we can as soon as we can and will progress our plans with the environmental aspects very much to the forefront.

Further Response

No, the Council will not, at this time, move to add such a line to the Programme's Plan.

However, the Council's ambition is to address such matters comprehensively as the programme proceeds and is making good progress with its plans for actively managing the environmental impact of the Future Chippenham scheme. Taken together with the answer above, such matters already feature as core elements of the Programme. A specific example might be a biodiversity study to understand how the scheme can achieve a 10% net gain. This would be followed by a Strategy and Investment Plan for natural capital attributed to the scheme. In turn this would allow us to plan the optimisation of different natural and societal assets and maximise the contribution of those assets into the ecosystems they support.