

Executive 5 September 2019.

Agenda item 7 – Garden Communities

Questions from Councillor Bullivant

Newton Abbot Garden Community proposals.

- 1) Does the Executive recognise that the significant opportunity that the proposed grant makes possible is because Teignbridge Council has an adopted local plan (Plan Teignbridge) and that there has been a successful delivery of both new homes and affordable homes since Plan Teignbridge was adopted.*

Response from the Leader

I am very glad that Cllr Bullivant recognises, like I do, the significant opportunity this brings to our district, and particularly to Newton Abbot. I agree that the positive reputation with Homes England in relation to planning and delivery helped. That reputation was built on our adopted local plan, a proactive approach to investment in local infrastructure and continued good communication between the council and Homes England. This was enhanced by a clear commitment to planning for the future via the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan and our own Local Plan. Our intention as a new administration is to enhance that reputation to continue to reap its benefits of improved local infrastructure, while continuing to contest the Government's Housing formula and numbers.

- 2) Does the Executive recognise that in Paragraph 2.4 the terms relate to the delivery of higher quality, distinctive homes, including affordable housing, and will the decision not to provide affordable homes within the Sherbourne House plans impact on future government support given that the delivery of Social rented accommodation is the responsibility of other bodies.*

Response from the Leader

The council decision to provide the apartments at Sherborne House as a social rent product, which has a lower rent than using the alternative "affordable rent" model, will provide a wider range of affordable housing provision in Newton Abbot. It will provide much needed accommodation for 14 families at a rent they can afford in a sustainable location in the heart of the town. I don't think it at all likely that this decision will have undermined our relationship with Homes England. Over the last few years the government has become more supportive of councils' direct provision of housing as part of the overall national mix of housing supply. This administration is clearly committed to assisting those in greatest housing need.

- 3) *As this award has been achieved because of this councils successful delivery of homes under Plan Teignbridge up to the end of 2018 will the Executive give credit to the officers who have worked on the successful delivery and also the previous executive who oversaw this successful plan*

Response from the Leader

While this administration is intending to do many things differently from the previous executive, clearly we will not be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We fully recognise the good work of the officers in preparing this successful bid and the planning work leading up to it. Indeed, the council's officers have been successful in achieving a wide range of financial and other investments by government. We will continue to support them in working on and submitting bids which benefit our area.

Questions from Councillor Daws

Can TDC assure the residents that accepting the Garden Village Grant does not further tie TDC into what is already know to be a flawed Local Plan and the GESP. The Local Plan was foisted on the Teignbridge Residents totally against their expressed views in consultations, using what are now admitted to be housing numbers that were concocted 'with no specific methodology'. For this alone Teignbridge residents deserve a thorough and full review of the Local Plan. In the light a true Climate Change Emergency the Local Plan and GESP both need to be torn up with new and appropriate ground breaking plans being developed. If accepting the Garden Community grant ties TDC further into the existing outdated and flawed plans then in the best interests of the residents of the residents these funds from Westminster should not be accepted. a body that has show no wisdom or moral leadership in development policy in the last decade and beyond.

Is it not also appropriate that ward councillors are consulted directly on matters that specifically and materially relate to their ward and electorate?

Response from the Leader

Our strategy has always been, and will continue to be, to work within the rules imposed on us, but to challenge what we believe to be unfair; and to put Teignbridge in the best possible position, both financially and strategically, to build communities that are happy, healthy, affordable and environmentally sustainable.

As Councillor Daws is also aware, the new approach to housing need calculations set out in the government's policy already applies to our planning decisions. I have made the position of this Council very clear, that we do not support the new approach. I have twice written to the Prime Minister asking the government to change their approach, and you will have seen the press coverage. But it is clear that unless there is a change in national policy we have no choice but to update our plan taking account of the new calculation. We are committed to ensuring high quality new homes and neighbourhoods, and Garden Communities status will be an important part of our toolbox in ensuring quality, environmental sustainability and an infrastructure that enables communities to thrive. It would be a very irresponsible Council, lacking in any wisdom or moral leadership, who would simply tear up their Local Plan and with it any control over future planning.

Any future decisions on development strategy and planning in Teignbridge will be taken via the Local Plan process as is right and proper. This is explained clearly in the report. The update of our Local Plan is underway and all members will continue to be consulted as it progresses.

It is of course totally incorrect to say that the housing target in the local plan was "concocted with no specific methodology". The methodology used is set out in significant detail in technical reports on the Council's website. Councillor Daws has been pointed to the methodology on a number of occasions.

We are very much at the start of the consultation process, which will take place as part of the comprehensive Local Plan review. It is my sincere hope and intention that all Councillors will actively participate in this consultation

Question from Councillor Mullone

Some of our citizens may struggle to understand what exactly we're being offered here. But it looks like £150,000 – a nothing amount in development terms – with 'further funding might be available if strong progress with planning for high quality new neighbourhoods can be demonstrated'. So it seems they're giving us a toffee, and there might be more if the Executive does exactly as it's told. This document is littered with all the usual figleaf weasel words such as 'sustainable' and 'creative environment' and 'climate change mitigation', all of which mean nothing. It is based on the premise that we must build an inordinate number of houses anyway, a premise I and my group flatly reject and which this executive has stated that it would challenge. Would this contemptible offer not be a good opportunity to say that Newton Abbot doesn't need a 'Garden Town', a phrase we know means concrete sprawl dressed up in green cynicism, and repeat that what we need is more money given TO the council, for things this council knows are needed. Does the executive not feel that telling Westminster to stick this money, which is intended as nothing more than a gateway to our turning into a Southwest Luton, a better course of action?

Response from the Leader

The Garden Communities fund is not about building more homes; it is about having more control over the homes that are built across the District and planning a better, more attractive and more sustainable infrastructure around them, both for local people now, and for future generations.

The additional funding will allow Teignbridge more control over the housing development it is required to deliver, as well as additional affordable homes and green spaces, community facilities such as health and community centres, and sustainable travel links.

Garden Community status is, in our view, a key element in our continued success in receiving capital funding and other support from government to improve our district, and in this case our town. The successful High Street Fund bid is just a first example and we expect more over the years.

The immediate payment is £150,000 which will be used to fund work to bring forward plans to create higher quality and lower carbon homes and neighbourhoods and we fully expect this to be followed up with further funding.

Decisions on development in this district will continue to be taken through the proper and formal local plan process, and will be based on clear and detailed evidence about the suitability of areas for all forms of development, dealing with and reducing climate change and protecting and improving wildlife.

A plan can only be adopted if it is done so legally. That means an Inspector must pass it as "sound". No Inspector will do so if it is totally at odds with government policy.

Without a plan we are looking at house building through the appeals process - unplanned, uncoordinated growth, with less infrastructure and fewer affordable homes. Our staff will be spending their time fighting unwinnable appeals which will result in the same amount of development, but without the benefits of a controlled, planned system using whatever funding is available to deliver a sustainable infrastructure.

I have made, and will continue to make, the case for a change in the planning policy on housing numbers. But no serious council can afford to tell the government to "stick it" in the way that you suggest. Councillor Mullone may consider this to be just 'a toffee', but this administration is very clear that improving our town centres and the wider town is crucial in the face of major economic and social changes ahead of us.

It is disappointing in the extreme that a councillor of this authority regards solar panels on every house, triple glazing, electric charging points, water capture, efficient and regular public transport, easy pedestrian, cycling and disabled facilities and lavender filled gardens as "Green Cynicism"

The fundamental point, which is inescapable, is that despite unique protests from myself to two Prime Ministers, the governments flawed formula means we have no alternative to the dictatorial stances of Central Government. We must take the housing numbers, with or without the money. In those circumstances who refuses money?

Agenda Item 8 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Questions from Councillor Bullivant

- 1) *Can the Executive confirm that the proposed changes are cost neutral compared with current provision as per para 5.1*
- 2) *What is the cost increase by removing the Band D property restriction*
- 3) *What is the cost of having an increase in back dated claims from 1 month up to 12 months*
- 4) *What is the cost of removing the non-dependent deductions*

Response from Portfolio for Corporate Services

Thank you for the questions. The Executive is asked today to approve the proposals for wider consultation, including reference to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is anticipated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee members will wish to consider the proposals and it is therefore, perhaps, premature of you as Chair of that committee to submit these questions ahead of the committee agenda.