

TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

12TH NOVEMBER 2019

CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISION OF 8TH OCTOBER 2019 RE EXISTING AND FUTURE POLICIES TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' RESPONSE

Cllr Gary Taylor, PH for Planning
Cllr Jackie Hook, PH for Climate Change and Housing

Introduction

The decisions made by the executive which have been called in covered four areas, and we would like to comment on these below, taking account of the reasons given for the call-in.

Resolution 1 – that the existing policies of the Local Plan which require a reduction in carbon emissions are noted.

As a “noted” resolution, nothing arises in relation to this.

Resolution 2 – the carbon emissions reduction target in S7 should be read to reflect the new national carbon reduction target which is to achieve a reduction in carbon emissions of at least 100% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels (equivalent to a 48% reduction between 2017 and 2033).

We note that this resolution is not referred to in the “call-in” reasons and it is therefore a real shame that the call-in has prevented the planning officers from applying this new target over the past month or so. The resolution would have required developers to “up their game” on carbon reductions, because policy EN3 requires carbon reduction plans which meet the target set in S7. By calling in the decision, this more stringent target can't be applied to decisions until the call-in is over. We think that is a month of potential improvement wasted.

This is the key reason that we ask O&S to allow the original decision to be implemented without challenge, so that the council can get on with implementing our existing policies in as strong a way as we can.

Resolution 3 - the existing Teignbridge Local Plan low carbon policies are given an appropriate weight in planning decisions which reflects the council's climate emergency declaration and the new statutory national carbon reduction target.

Again, we see that this element of the resolution is not mentioned in the call-in. And again, it is a real shame that we have lost a month. In particular, the call-in has postponed approval for the budget of £5,000 needed to get specialist advice on submitted carbon reduction plans required by the existing EN3 policy.

This is the second main reason which we ask O&S to not challenge the decision and allow it to be implemented as soon as possible.

Resolution 4 - a suite of policies is prepared through an update of the Local Plan to meet Climate Change challenges and are developed in consultation with local experts and interest groups, such as Action on Climate in Teignbridge.

We see that this is the only element of the resolution referred to in the call-in.

As you will know this administration is fully committed to bringing climate change matters to the centre of our local plan work. We said so before the election, we said so after we became the administration and we say so now. We are sure that this is not just a commitment from our party, but is something of which all Teignbridge Councillors are supportive. Our Climate Change declaration was passed unanimously, after all. And here is what we are doing already

- We elevated climate change in the council workings by appointing a specific portfolio holder to oversee the work
- We have resolved to ensure that the existing planning policies are read in a way which makes maximum possible reductions in our carbon emissions – an innovative approach to planning policy, although obviously this call-in has delayed that by an unfortunate month.
- We have agreed to continue to work with our neighbours and partners on wider planning matters, to ensure that we multiply our individual efforts moving towards a zero carbon economy on the fastest feasible timeline.
- We will bring forward new planning policies on an accelerated timescale so that new planning applications which come forward are climate friendly as soon as possible.
- We have agreed the first parts of a Climate Change Action Plan including the appointment of a specialist new officer to oversee the work.
- We have responded to Client Earth positively to confirm our climate change commitment. Our response has been published on the council's website.
- And we can confirm that we will be giving much greater emphasis to Action on Climate in our new and revised 10 year council strategy which will be coming to council for agreement early next year.

Now, of course, we are happy to talk about climate change and our plans to reinforce that sense of urgency. We are delighted that Overview and Scrutiny has the chance to do so now.

But any local plan has to go through a statutory process. We have sped up the process through careful management and by taking advantage of new government policies. But there is a limit to how quickly a complex process of multiple consultation, evidence gathering, complicated legal requirements and independent examination can go. We also have to be very careful that, as a council, we don't give the impression that we have a closed and predetermined mind on matters like planning. This executive resolution was carefully crafted by officers to avoid these legal traps, while clearly setting out a direction of travel. Clearly, like all of you, we see the clear benefits of clear and quantifiable policies on development, design and climate change. But we have to let the plan making process run through or we risk scuppering the plan before we start! Similarly the Strategic Environmental Assessment is required by law to include an assessment of impact on climate change.

As you will know, the first meeting of the Local Plan Working Group has already happened, and there was a well-informed and lively discussion about the shape of our emerging plan policies. We are sure that this will continue. Let's trust ourselves to make the right decisions, let's trust the officers to give us the good, technical advice we need to do so, and let's make sure that we don't drop a legal clanger at this early stage.

Therefore, again we suggest to you that, after having your discussion, you confirm the original decision, and let the Planning Working Group and Planning Committee get on with its job.

APPENDIX 2