

(4) PUBLIC QUESTIONS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10, questions have been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

(1) From Mr. P Moylan of Cirencester, on behalf of Save Our Cirencester, to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'The on-going development of the local plan and the corresponding Chesterton application has slowly revealed to the community the truly massive scale of this development. It is the fervent wish of nearly everyone in Cirencester that this number should be reduced. It has been reported that in response to a question from a district councillor about reducing the numbers that the Council's reply was that changing policy would have to undo years of work. Policy would not be changed because it would undo years of work.

Does Councillor Parsons not accept that such a reply exposes how weak the Council feels about its own policy. Such an answer simply will not do when we are talking about something as important as this. Save Our Cirencester has found many reasons why this is bad policy and bad policy should not be implemented because no matter how many years of work it has taken, it is as nothing compared with the everlasting damage that such a policy will inflict on Cirencester. Do you agree that the explanation given to the District Councillor about reducing numbers was totally inadequate?'

Response from Councillor NJW Parsons

'During the Local Plan process, the Council has considered the consequences of delay, or even abandonment, of the process, having regard to the Government's policy that Local Plans would be imposed by the Planning Inspectorate if not adopted by 2017. The Council has consistently been of the view that it would be better to continue to progress the Local Plan, rather than risk a delay that might result in a Local Plan being imposed by Government to the significant disadvantage of those living in the District.

That said, the Local Plan has been built on a strategy that the Council has agreed as being the right strategy for the District. It is the culmination of many years of work, many consultations, and the consideration of various options along the way - and I remain convinced that a change in strategy is not required. My response to Councillor Harris reflected the work undertaken on the Local Plan, the Council's agreed strategy, and my own personal views on how other potential changes might affect the situation as time moves on - and was a pragmatic one given to a District Councillor who understood the implications of delay. Had the question been asked by a member of the public, I would have provided a full explanation of the implications of delay.

The Council received approximately 1,300 representations in response to the Regulation 18 consultation, of which around 150 related to the strategic site south of Chesterton, Cirencester. While it is accepted that a good proportion of those representations expressed an objection to the site and put forward a number of modifications, including the suggestion that the level of housing should be lowered, I struggle to see how such level of response could equate to the comment made that "It is the fervent wish of nearly everyone in Cirencester that this number should be reduced" - this simply does not follow. I can also confirm that a number of the representations expressed their support for the strategic site.'

(2) From Mr. D James of Cirencester, on behalf of Save Our Cirencester, to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'The residents of Cirencester are very worried by the harm from pollution that the huge development at Chesterton would bring. Traffic-borne air pollution is now a national and international health hazard and there are reports of 40,000 premature deaths in the UK. Traffic volumes and pollution implications have been understated in the Environmental Statement produced by Bathurst Development Limited to support their application.

We believe that the Environmental Statement has dealt inadequately with the threat of pollution hazard based on research we have undertaken and a detailed report that we have produced. This has been submitted to both the local plan consultation and the outline application public access system. Our report draws particular attention to pollution levels at the hospital and schools. The underlying criticism we have of the BDL-commissioned Environmental Statement is that it is based on outdated guidelines which ignore recent evidence and which we believe do not represent up-to-date best practice.

It would be appreciated if the Council could convene discussions about these concerns with the relevant parties, including representatives of the community. Will the Council do this?'

Response from Councillor NJW Parsons

'The Council commissioned an external review of the Environmental Statement (ES), which flagged up that some areas in the ES, relating to air quality, required further clarification. The Council is expecting the submission of additional information next month in response to this review, and it is understood that the matters raised by Save Our Cirencester will also be addressed by the applicant.'

Notes:

- (i) These questions were, submitted after the deadline by which answers could be guaranteed either in advance of, or at, the Cabinet Meeting. However, the Deputy Leader/Cabinet Member for Forward Planning has been able to provide responses in the time available, which have been sent to the questioners.
- (ii) If the questioners are present at the Meeting, they will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or their original question.
- (iii) The Member to whom any supplementary question is addressed will try and answer any supplementary question at the Meeting; but if this is not possible, then the Members will answer as much as possible at the Meeting and then provide a full response within five working days. If, for any reason, a full response cannot be provided within those five days, then a holding response will be sent to the questioner, along with the reason for delay and a likely timescale for the full response.

(END)