

(5) PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Council Procedure Rule 10 - Not more than fifteen minutes allowed for written questions to be put by members of the public on any matter in relation to which the Council has any power or duties or which affects the District.

Questions have been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

(1) From Mr I Bullock of South Cerney to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Health, Environment and Communities

'It is nine months since Councillor Stowe announced at a public meeting in South Cerney Village Hall that the Council were withdrawing their planning application for a waste transfer station at the Packers Leaze site in South Cerney in the light of public outcry and objection. Since that time the Council has also withdrawn their application for planning permission for a transport depot at the site, instead pursuing a CLEUD for the site. It is understood that the Council has now bought the site and works are being undertaken in preparation for the transfer of transport operations to the site. Can the Councillor please set out what the Council's intentions are for the site including answers to the following questions?

1. Can the Council confirm that they have purchased the site and set out the cost of the acquisition (including taxes and acquisition costs)?
2. What works are the Council undertaking at the site in preparation for the transfer of the transport facilities to the site?
3. When are transport operations expected to relocate from the T Barry site to the Packers Leaze site?
4. When will all SITA waste containers and other equipment be removed from the site?
5. Is the Council assessing the suitability of the site for a waste transfer station and is it the Council's intention to re-apply for planning permission for a waste transfer station at the Packers Leaze site?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

I would respond as follows:-

1. Yes, the Council has purchased the site. The purchase price was £1,674,722; and land taxes amounted to £68,098.
2. Predominantly internal refurbishment works to the office/workshops to increase office, storage and welfare facilities.
3. At the end of May 2016.
4. SITA have a licence to occupy the area to the front of the site until October 2017.
5. There is no intention to progress this at this time.

(2) From Mr T Golics of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'This question is concerned with the Local Plan and the Bathurst outline application for building 2350 homes on the edge of Cirencester.

The Head of Cirencester Town Council's Planning Committee has stepped down from the Conservative's local branch saying he thought it wise to do so, so that there is no suggestion of party politics and to avoid accusations of a conflict of interests and accusations of cronyism. We understand why he has done that.

In the context of this and comments made in the public realm about cronyism, are CDC and its individual councillors confident that it, and they, are unaffected by possible conflicts of interest?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

Members of Cotswold District Council have a duty to act in accordance with the Council's Constitution and Code of Conduct. The Code not only refers to the seven principles of public life, but also the circumstances in which Members are required to declare Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) and Other Interests. If Members have an interest to declare in respect of Council business then they must do so; indeed, failure to declare a DPI without a reasonable excuse is a criminal offence and could lead to investigation by the Police and referral to the Director of Public Prosecutions. If a Member is unsure as to whether an interest should be declared, then he/she can seek advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer and/or an independent source, albeit that the decision to declare ultimately rests with the Member.

(3) From Mr P Moylan of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'The local plan states "Having tested many options and combinations for delivering the appropriate amount of housing for Cirencester, it concludes that a single strategic site is the only viable solution" Many local people think otherwise. An alternative site or sites would be to build on poorer quality farmland south of Preston toll bar adjacent to the A419 and also land nearby between the A419 and the A417. This location is much better than at South Chesterton for many reasons including proximity of roads and utilities and services already provided to the Dobbies site and the military base.

Can the council provide evidence that it has in fact tested "many" options and combinations and whether it has actively sought alternatives for delivering housing, including extending the development boundary to the south/south east alongside the A419 and A417?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

I can confirm that considerable effort has been expended throughout the plan preparation process to identify appropriate and deliverable sites in sustainable locations. It is a requirement of all local planning authorities to explore all realistic options when: (i) preparing a development strategy for delivering future growth in the area; and (ii) identifying sustainable and

deliverable sites. This is done through an exhaustive process of evidence gathering and assessment. All of the evidence is available to view on the Council's website. However, some of the key documents to help you are set out below with the relevant links:

- Consideration of various strategic options for locating development - Core Strategy Second Issues and Options (December 2010): http://consult.cotswold.gov.uk/portal/fp/cs/2nd_io?tab=files
- Consideration of all available sites made known to the Council - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (various dates): <http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/residents/planning-building/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan/evidence-base-and-monitoring/>
- Explanation of various strands of evidence, including consultation stages, leading up to the January 2015 consultation - Development Strategy Evidence Paper (December 2014): <http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/1087625/EVIDENCE-PAPER-Development-Strategy-December-2014.pdf>
- Independent assessment of reasonable alternatives for the Strategy, including site options appraisal - Sustainability Appraisal December 2014: http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/1060692/CDLP_-_Interim-SA-Report_v-4-0_031214-FINAL.pdf and http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/1060695/CDLP_Interim-SA-Report-appendices-FINAL_v-2-0_031214.pdf

The preparation of District-wide strategy options concluded that Cirencester is the location where a strategic scale of development should be located. These options appraisals were subjected to Sustainability Appraisal.

I would refer you to the Sustainability Appraisal which accompanied the Preferred Development Strategy (May 2013) which compared several potential sites of strategic scale at Cirencester:

http://consult.cotswold.gov.uk/portal/fp/sa/sa_interim_report_2013?tab=files

These included land at Hare Bushes and east of Kingshill Lane, as well as south of Chesterton, even though the first two hadn't been put forward through the SHLAA process (and were therefore technically not available/deliverable). These sites were considered for comparison purposes and to ensure that CDC had adopted a transparent approach to the selection of a suitable strategic site. It has subsequently been confirmed, by the landowner, that the other two sites are not available, and Cirencester Town Council has also opposed Hare Bushes in particular.

I would also refer you to the Development Strategy Evidence Paper:

http://consult.cotswold.gov.uk/portal/fp/development_strategy_evidence_paper_-_2013/evidence_paper_2013?tab=files

which concluded that Chesterton was a reasonable location for a strategic scale of development, taking account of all the evidence available. That evidence included the identification of Cirencester as the District's pre-eminent centre, as well as sites that had emerged through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) process.

(4) From Mr J Nicholas of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'Of the Chesterton strategic site, the local plan says "This will probably be the largest development in the District over the next 20 years and as such it is important that the community and stakeholders are fully involved in its conception and design"

Section 61W of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 added by the Localism Act 2011 places a legal duty on developers to consult local communities on very large scale development proposals prior to submitting a planning application. The obligations of the council were thus fortunately taken on mostly by the developer.

The council set out a table of methods that could be used:-

- Media (local press, radio, etc)
- Internet (website, e-mails, etc)
- Notice boards
- Town meetings
- Public exhibitions
- One to one meetings
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Working groups

Given the importance the council attaches to communication and consultation, it is surely important to have a record of which of these methods were used, their frequency, who attended and so on. It would be important also to try and measure how effective these methods have been, for example by eliciting community feedback. Does it believe that a good job has been done and how does it know this?

Response from Councillor Parsons

I can assure Mr Nicholas that the Council has consulted widely with the public on the proposals for the Chesterton Strategic site.

In 2011 we consulted the public (via several CDC-arranged events and media releases/website postings) when we issued a 'Core Strategy Second Issues and Options' paper, resulting in almost 1300 representations from 140 individuals and organisations. These comments influenced the content of the emerging Local Plan, including the requirement for a strategic site. We issued several media releases in 2012 charting progress on the Local Plan, and also commissioned interviews with local journalists to explain the basics. We also provided details about Local Plan progress in the August 2012 CDC Cotswold News magazine, including a map of the potential site at Chesterton, and this was sent to all households in the District.

The table below shows more detail from 2013 onwards to emphasise the effort which we have expended on ensuring the public and principal stakeholders have been consulted and informed as the Local Plan has taken shape. This is not exhaustive by any means because it is focused on issues with a bearing on the Chesterton strategic site. It also does not account for a

wide range of related ad hoc queries we have dealt with from the public and the media about Chesterton.

CDC actions	Date	CDC consultation/information
Cabinet Meeting to seek approval of Preferred Development Strategy	9 May 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder issued briefing note to Members (including specific reference to Chesterton) • Press release was issued and posted on CDC website advising of forthcoming public consultation on paper setting out strategies for the development of 17 settlements (including Chesterton). • Press release was issued and posted on CDC website calling for public to nominate land or buildings with potential to meet future housing, employment, retail or commercial need.
Public Consultation (Six-week period)	June-July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further press releases were issued and posted on CDC website advising launch of consultation on paper setting out strategies for the development of 17 settlements plus issues such as access to services and facilities, transport and commuting issues, demographic changes, and matters related to the local economy. • Press release issued and posted on CDC website advising of dates for related public consultation meetings (Cirencester and Moreton) • CDC distributed individual leaflets regarding the Chesterton Strategic site proposals to 12,000 homes in the Cirencester area, including information about how to comment during the June/July 2013 public consultation. • CDC hosted community meeting in Chesterton church on 5 June attended by over 160 people. • Further CDC-hosted consultation meetings at St Lawrence's Hall, Chesterton 28 June; CDC Chamber 2 July; Moreton Area Centre 3 July (public notified by Press Release/website/social media and also paid-for announcement in local press). • CDC posted information about the consultation period on its newly launched social media account. • CDC Paid-for Notice appeared in local press • Planning Matters e-newsletter issued (on CDC website) • Briefs sent to Members and emails to town and parish clerks • Verbal briefings provided to local media • Press package (Q/A style) was handed to media. • Explanatory leaflets were distributed at public meetings

<p>CDC Workshops and community engagement with town and parish councillors and other community reps - focus was on the 17 settlements included in the Preferred Development Strategy.</p>	<p>January-March 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC developed plans, data and other information to help inform these engagement exercises • Information was cascaded to residents via community reps who attended CDC workshops • Specific briefing sessions took place in communities • March briefing notes were sent to CDC Councillors.
<p>Actions prior to CDC Cabinet consideration of Local Plan on 4 Dec 2014</p>	<p>November 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC contacted all settlements who took part in community engagement workshops. Sent them covering letter and site allocations based on their feedback. • All Parish and Town Council's received details of the forthcoming consultation period (Jan-Feb 2015) and an edited version that could be reproduced in their own parish magazines. • Parish and Town Councils received update briefings from CDC on 24 Nov and 1 Dec. • Press Release was issued and posted on CDC website/social media site outlining the forthcoming consultation period dates.
<p>Six-week public consultation on emerging Local Plan development strategy and site allocations (Reg.18)</p>	<p>January-February 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotswold News magazine (December 2014) was issued to all households, advising how to comment. • Press releases were issued and posted on CDC website/social media site. • Cirencester Town Council website displayed consultation details. • A second leaflet focusing on proposals for Chesterton was sent to 12,000 homes in Cirencester area • Briefs sent to CDC Councillors and emails to town and parish clerks • Verbal briefings to local media • Public Drop-in events at Cirencester and Moreton • CDC-hosted business breakfast (Cirencester) • Press package (Q/A style) was provided to media • Hard copies of consultation documents sent to local libraries and also to the 18 settlements earmarked for development. • Posters affixed to CDC noticeboards around town and on other noticeboards, including Cirencester Town Council. • Bespoke communications were issued to all Parish and Town Clerks, including hard copy posters to deploy and CD copies of all documentation. • Feature item about consultation appeared on Cotswold TV

Online survey to gather residents' views on provision of open spaces in emerging Local Plan.	July-August 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press release was issued and posted on CDC website/social media site. • Survey was posted online until 14 August; printed copies were also made available at public buildings, including local libraries and CDC offices in Cirencester and Moreton Area Centre.
Development Management Policies Consultation (Reg. 18)	<p>October 2015 Cabinet approval</p> <p>November-December 2015 public consultation</p>	<p>Pre-consultation (Oct/Nov 2015)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanatory emails sent to members and Town and Parish councils (plus other key stakeholders) • Briefing to Members in Chamber • Briefed Parish and Town Councils • Press briefing plus Q/A style press package issued. • CDC officials met with Cirencester Town Council (5 Nov) • Press release preparing ground was issued prior to consultation. Also posted on CDC website/social media site. <p>During consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases were issued setting out how to comment. Posted on CDC website/social media site. • Cirencester Town Council website included details of consultation. • CDC Forward Planning manager briefed media on consultation. More verbal briefings were provided to media as required. • Cotswold News residents magazine was delivered to all households, focusing on the consultation, and advising how to comment. • CDC planners hosted drop-in sessions at Cirencester and Moreton. Information boards were on display for public to view. • Briefs given to CDC Councillors and emails sent to town and parish clerks • Posters on CDC noticeboards (and other noticeboards) • Press package (Q/A style) developed and provided to media. • Hard copies of Local Plan documents sent to local libraries
Feedback from Reg. 18 consultations	December 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC issued two press releases directing the public to the relevant website pages listing all responses to the Reg. 18 consultations in Jan-Feb 2015 and Nov-Dec 2015. Both releases were posted on our website/social media site.

To sum up, I believe that the Council has undertaken a comprehensive public relations exercise, ensuring that residents and other important stakeholders have been made aware of proposals for Chesterton and have been informed about how they can contribute to the process. The total number of responses that CDC has received for just the Reg. 18 consultations alone - 2,447

consultees submitting 11,667 comments - demonstrates that our engagement methods have been successful.

As Mr Nicholas has indicated, Bathurst Development Ltd (BDL) also engaged extensively with the community prior to submitting an outline planning application for Chesterton in December 2015. BDL's obligation to produce a Master Plan Framework (MPF) and the required extent of their community engagement was specified within the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. We believe that they produced the MPF in accordance with our stipulations.

Here are some details of their community engagement actions:

- Creation of a website www.chestertoncirencester.co.uk to display information and to provide details of community events and consultations.
- Community events including: Community Planning Weekend - 9 & 10 May 2014 (involving workshops and a drop-in exhibition); Community Forum - 18 June 2014 (involving a workshop and presentations); Learning Journey - 15 August 2014 (involving visits to three schemes outside of the District); Community Forum - 22 October 2014 (involving updates on the technical work that had been carried out and updates on the progress of the planning application and the Local Plan, along with new exhibition boards); Movement and Transport Day - 26 November 2014 (involving a series of workshops assessing movement and transport); Community Update Exhibition 13-14 July 2015 (involving updates on the progress of the MPF and the application, including emerging transport mitigation measures, exhibition boards and a hand-out).
- Three-week consultation period on the MPF itself, from 5 - 26 October 2015. Consultation flyers were delivered to 9,980 households in Cirencester, Stratton and Siddington. Letters were posted to 323 local stakeholders who had been identified by John Thompson and Partners (JTP) or who had provided their contact details to JTP. Householders in the immediate vicinity of the site received a hand-out that summarised the MPF and two advertisements were placed within the Wilts and Glos Standard on consecutive weeks.
- Hard copies of the MPF were made available for the public to view at the Cirencester Library, at the offices of Cirencester Town Council and Cotswold District Council and, for certain times, at the St Lawrence Church Centre.
- Responses to the MPF from third parties (a total of 69) and stakeholders were collated and analysed by the applicant's team.
- Final public presentation of the MPF on 20 and 21 November before it was submitted to the Council on 15 December 2015.

Finally, I note that several critics (mostly hiding behind assumed names) have cast doubts about CDC's efforts to draw public attention to the BDL outline application, claiming that we are preventing them from exercising their right to comment. For the record, please note that CDC has gone far beyond the normal requirements laid upon a local authority when considering a planning application. Here are some examples:

- We extended the deadline for comments on the BDL outline application to six weeks rather than the statutory time period of 21 days. Furthermore, we have made it clear that the extended deadline (until 3 March 2016) is not a 'cut-off date' and that we will accept comments up to the point of issuing a decision. However, we have pointed out that it will help us to receive comments within a defined timescale in case there are any queries or points raised which require further information or clarification.
- On receiving the outline application, the CDC planning team sent out over 700 letters of notification and posted 34 pairs of site notices in and around the application site and in close proximity to the highways works. In the interests of transparency, photographs and a 'location map' of the notices were added to the Planning Register. The team also compiled a very useful Frequently Asked Questions guide at <http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/residents/planning-building/planning/chesterton-planning-application/> to help anyone wishing to make a comment.
- When the application arrived at CDC, we issued a Press Release informing the public that we would announce a consultation period as soon as the application had been processed. A second Press Release was duly issued, instructing readers how to comment, and referring them to the FAQ guide. Both Press Releases gave rise to articles in the local media. They were also displayed prominently on the CDC website home page and on our social media site.

(5) From Mr D James of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'In CDC's promotional leaflet for Chesterton it says ... "to help Cirencester remain a good place to live and work, and further improve its facilities in the future, the town must continue to accommodate a sizeable share of the district's future housing and employment requirement".

Can Councillor Parsons explain why accommodating a sizeable share of the district's future housing will help Cirencester remain a good place to live and also why such a sizeable share will further improve facilities in the town and what those improvements will be (over and above those changes, e.g. highways, which are required for the development per se)?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

Work to date on the Local Plan has identified Cirencester as the most sustainable place within the Cotswold District for development. It has therefore been allocated a proportionate amount of employment and housing sites within the Plan.

By increasing employment opportunities in Cirencester, the Local Plan will improve the employment prospects within the Town.

The allocation of a strategic site to Cirencester within the Local Plan will ensure that this development will be properly supported with the required infrastructure.

An increased population living and working in Cirencester will help the Town to prosper and to compete successfully against neighbouring centres such as Swindon, Cheltenham Stroud and Gloucester.

(6) From Mr G Burley of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'As we understand it, the size of the Chesterton strategic site at 110 hectares, on which it was planned to build 2500 houses, was found to have constraints which led to a rather more than expected diminution in space so that only 55 hectares could be built on. The local plan and the BDL application now proposes 2350 dwellings. The council must be aware that to persist with 2350 dwellings with such a large and unexpected diminution will result in a housing density much higher than originally envisaged. Will the council explain why it is trying to meet its target on an ever smaller area of land?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

CDC has always been aware of the constraints of the Chesterton strategic site and these have been factored in throughout the process. The gross density of the site is 19.6 dwellings per hectare compared with 28 dwellings per hectare for the existing housing areas nearest to the allocated site. That is about two-thirds the gross density of the Cranhams Park development, which lacks areas of open space. Mixed densities add variety and visual interest to development schemes, which is often lacking in more homogenous developments built several decades ago. The densities originally envisaged for the Chesterton site were gross densities in the knowledge that significant open spaces, community hub, etc., would form an integral part of this mixed use proposal (the site also includes 9.1 hectares of employment land), plus an acknowledgement that there were areas of the site which could not be built upon due to constraints (e.g. gas pipeline, overhead cables).

(7) From Mr M Pratley of Cirencester to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'Cirencester has 3387 new homes allocated to it in the draft local plan. Since the start of the plan period, and in the absence of an approved local plan, houses have been built and permissions granted for at least one thousand dwellings. An application has been made for 2350 homes at Chesterton. It is likely that new builds and permissions will continue so that the Cirencester target allocation will be exceeded unless the number at Chesterton is reduced accordingly.

Is it the council's policy to irrespectively ring fence Chesterton so that 2350 dwellings will be built and is it possible that Cirencester could in fact get many more new homes than 3387 over the plan period?

Given that 3387 means that Cirencester already has the highest burden of new homes of similar sized towns, how can the council justify this policy and this outcome?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

Many of the 1,000 homes built/approved at Cirencester since 2011 have been at Kingshill on sites that were allocated in the 2006 Local Plan. Further 'windfalls' within the town would yield nothing like this number of dwellings.

In any event, the District-wide housing requirement, derived from the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN), is not a ceiling. It is a minimum target, which CDC must demonstrate it can deliver. To ensure 'soundness', Local Plans need to be based on up-to-date evidence, such as national household and economy projections, which can profoundly affect the OAN. Updates to the OAN could result in further increases to the District housing requirement. In a situation where it is challenging to identify sufficient deliverable/sustainable sites to meet the current requirement, every site identified to date makes an important contribution to the development strategy.

The outline application submitted by BDL is for up to 2,350 dwellings, if outline planning permission is granted, 2,350 will be the maximum number of dwellings that can be constructed on the site in accordance with the outline planning permission.

A reduction in the amount of housing proposed for any site would effectively mean alternative(s) having to be found elsewhere - potentially in less sustainable locations. Recent appeal decisions give a clear indication that the Government is serious about addressing housing supply issues, and it clearly expects local planning authorities to do the same.

Notes:

(i) If any person who has submitted a question is present at the Meeting, he/she will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or his/her original question.

(ii) 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 Member 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)