

# COUNCIL

Monday 9 October 2017

## Agenda Item 6

### Questions from Members

#### Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent to Meeting

##### **9. Question from Councillor M Clarke to the Cabinet Member for Planning**

The Council has, I believe, committed to a strategic study in the feasibility of reopening the High Wycombe to Bourne End rail link for heavy rail. Their contribution being c.a. £100,000.

In the draft local plan there are several policy statements about repurposing the route of the permanent way between High Wycombe and Bourne End for use as a cycle and foot way.

Could this Council be told how much officer time has been used and money spent, i.e. the costs incurred, on these two mutually exclusive options for the existing route of the permanent way?

##### **Reply given by Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning).**

It is right to note that we are supporting the County Council as they seek to create an attractive route for walking and cycling away from traffic along the old railway line. We are also considering the options for a rail connection between the Chiltern line and Great West Mainline, and of course now, Crossrail.

It is not right though to say that these two projects are mutually exclusive. A walking and cycling route along parts of the old railway has the potential to be delivered in the shorter term, compared to ideas for reinstating the railway which are a much longer term proposition, and very far from certain at this stage in terms of the eventual outcome.

Conversion of such routes have been a success elsewhere and there is potential for the same in this case as the route runs along the valley, and winds through and adjacent to the built up area. I would anticipate that even if the two schemes were to “take off”, any sections of a walking and cycling route would have already given long years service. I would also anticipate that if such a scheme were in place and had proved a success that it would be possible and necessary for any longer term reinstatement of the railway to make provision for walking and cycling alongside the new route. Indeed there are sections of the old railway that have had such an arrangement historically (at least in relation to a parallel footpath), and such an arrangement is being put forward in relation to the HS2 scheme.

In terms of officer time, two officers spent a day walking the old alignment with Network Rail engineers and one of the officers has been leading on the feasibility commission over the past few months spending on average half a day a week on the project.

Another officer liaises with BCC on the footway cycle scheme and since 1 April has spent around three quarters of a day per month supporting the work of the County Council in relation to this project.

**10. Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council**

Under the Local plan the need to meet the housing target in the next decade and half appears to have nearly exhausted all the potential sites for housing.

Does the Leader agree that we cannot bury our heads in the sand and need to be proactive in looking for solutions to the housing problem and in this respect is it not the time for the policy surrounding the 'Green belt' to be reviewed so that a tiny percentage of the Green Belt may be freed for housing? (I understand that as little as 1% of the Green Belt may be sufficient to meet our future housing needs).

**Reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

The Council has undertaken a significant amount of work in preparing the new Local Plan and identifying sites that could be developed to meet our housing needs. This has included assessing the Green Belt within the District, as well as looking for sites in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Government policy still attaches a high level of importance to protecting the Green Belt. National policy requires that to change Green Belt boundaries we have to demonstrate that there are exceptional circumstances. This can only be done through the production or review of a local plan and needs to be done on a site by site basis rather than a generalised approach as suggested by the question. The Council has gone through this process to identify the sites that are proposed to be taken out of the Green Belt. It is also worth pointing out that the new Local Plan is having to deliver a lot more housing than we have had to in previous plans.

**11. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Housing**

As the cost of private rent continues to rise and becomes further out of reach for those on Housing Benefit or even an average income the need for low cost social housing is higher than ever. Waiting for suitable accommodation of this type can take many years which frequently has a negative impact on family life, educational attainment and employment prospects.

What number of properties for social rent would need to be built in the Wycombe District in order to eliminate the current waiting lists and meet future demand?

**Reply given by Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).**

The Council has worked with the other Buckinghamshire Districts to assess the need both for market housing and affordable housing – this work is included in the published Buckinghamshire Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment.

This work shows that the need for affordable housing of all types, including rented, for the period 2013-2033 is 3,100 homes, of which 2,600 is for affordable rented. This takes account of both current need and future projected need as a result of the growth in population and households over the years. The method for deriving this figure is different to taking the waiting list figure and projecting forward, but it is based on a Government methodology.

One of the reasons for this is that the waiting list does not entirely reflect the housing need in the District as not all households will register for social housing and does not account for households that are seeking other forms of affordable housing including shared ownership and other help to buy products.

You should be aware that social rented is no longer formally an affordable housing “product” – affordable rent is now produced which involves rents up to 80% of market rents.

As part of the work on preparing the Local Plan we have looked at the possible supply of affordable housing arising from the section 106 agreements with developers that secure a proportion of affordable housing. Applying the affordable housing proportions sought in the Local Plan to the housing land identified in the Plan would secure nearly enough affordable housing to meet the identified need of 3,100 affordable homes including the 2,600 affordable rented units. In addition, the Council has an agreement with Aylesbury Vale District Council as part of the Duty to Cooperate process on the Local Plan whereby the unmet need in Wycombe District of 2,275 homes (of all tenures) will be provided in Aylesbury Vale. A proportion of this would be affordable housing, so if there is any shortfall in affordable housing provision in Wycombe District there would be scope for some provision in Aylesbury Vale.

Finally, not all affordable housing comes from S106 agreements as the Registered Providers of Housing will often develop their own sites for affordable housing, over and above any S106 planning requirement.