

Responses to questions to Cabinet from Councillor Robin Stuchbury

1. Cambridge to Oxford expressway and planned housing development across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc

I'm seeking advice on at what point the new Buckinghamshire Council will be in a position, based on the evidence available, to state its position on the Oxford Cambridge Expressway project with the additional proposed planned housing development across the Cambridge to Oxford Arc, and with the known environmental impacts/challenges and economic pressures these two projects may produce.

Historically there were strong positions taken by the leaders of the then two local authorities; Buckinghamshire County Council and the now historical Aylesbury Vale District Council leaders. Where, as you are aware, motions were taken to both councils on the Oxford Cambridge Expressway of which both local authorities saw these proposals at that point as sinister. I will be guided by your response on where you believe, and when you believe, it is appropriate as stated previously with the evidence available to bring these matters before the local authority either within a future report or as a proposal form. The executive, with a view from our new Buckinghamshire council on both these challenging proposals/projects, and their implications on the environment/economics of the future of Buckinghamshire.

Response

I'd like to thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question. He has helpfully reminded Cabinet that the legacy Councils of Buckinghamshire County Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council agreed their opposition to the Expressway. We were delighted to hear that the Expressway project has been "paused" and there is no suggestion that this will change in the short term. In terms of the Oxford Cambridge Arc more generally, it is early days in terms of the project, and little has happened during the current Covid emergency. However, once the work steps up, the Council will be fully engaged in the development of its proposals and making the case for what is best for Buckinghamshire. Part of that process will be understanding the detail as it develops and I intend to keep members informed throughout the process.

Question

2. Vale of Aylesbury Plan to Buckinghamshire Council

In light of the fact the Vale of Aylesbury Plan was not in conformity when the Buckinghamshire Council came into operation, minded to the pressures and sensitivity of the VALP which is not in conformity with the historical southern district plans. In provision of affordable housing and infrastructure levy, of which both have a large financial implication going forward for the Buckinghamshire Council, at what point do you believe Buckinghamshire Council will be in a position to comment on the Vale of Aylesbury Plan as a local authority and how it seems these matters are progressing or not. And at what point would a body of work be taken forward within the department to harmonise the questions of infrastructure levy within Buckinghamshire and the affordable housing targets? I'll be guided by your response before forming a position. All views on these matters, though my opinions are well known and my concerns were raised within questions to the now historical shadow authority. It is only appropriate now that Buckinghamshire Council, as

the principal planning authority, seek clarity from the new Cabinet Member and Buckinghamshire Council on these concerns. Questions which will be a major part and inference going forward on the lives and aspirations of the Buckinghamshire Council constituents.

Response

Can I thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question.

Firstly, I would like to address the statement that the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) was “not in conformity” at the new Council’s inception. This may be a reference to the fact that VALP is not yet adopted, however, the VALP Inspector has already confirmed in his Interim Findings that the VALP is capable of being made sound through limited modifications. There is therefore no indication that the VALP is not in conformity with Government planning policy.

The question then refers to the matters of affordable housing and infrastructure levy which is taken to mean the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The reference in the question to “conformity with southern district plans” is taken to refer to the fact that the Wycombe Local Plan affordable housing policy is different from the policy in VALP and the fact that a CIL is in place in the Wycombe, Chiltern and South Bucks areas but not in Aylesbury Vale.

The matter of the difference in the affordable housing policies is still before the VALP Inspector. Until he writes his final report we will not know the outcome of his deliberations. This difference is clearly noted but the VALP policy is based on the published evidence supporting that plan in the same way that the Wycombe policy was justified by evidence taking into account the circumstances in that area. I should point out however that the Council has suggested a modification to the relevant VALP policy to allow the retention of the higher levels of affordable housing required in existing neighbourhood plans.

Going forward the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan will be the means to establish an affordable housing requirement for the whole of the new council’s area that conforms with the revised NPPF. In the meantime, Neighbourhood Plans may be able to adopt higher affordable housing targets should they produce evidence to support such targets and the VALP policy refers to a minimum of 25% percent being required.

With regard to CIL, Aylesbury Vale District Council did not progress a CIL within its area. However, the new Council has the opportunity to reassess this position as part of its plans for future work and it is my intention that this will now be progressed as a priority.