

FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 9 NOVEMBER 2016

**AGENDA ITEM 3 – PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – ORDER IN WHICH THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL WILL INVITE QUESTIONS BELOW RECEIVED
IN WRITING IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING**

1. From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure –
Councillor Bower
2. From Mr Chester to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure
- Councillor Bower
3. From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure –
Councillor Bower
4. From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure -
Councillor Bower

**THE FULL DETAIL OF THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED IS DETAILED
BELOW**

NOTE: The Chairman will:

- invite questions from members of the public who have submitted in writing their questions in line with the Council's Constitution;
- explain that the questions received will be answered by the appropriate Members of the Cabinet or the Chairman of the Overview Select Committee
- confirm that Public Question Time allows Members of the public to ask one question at a time and that a maximum of one minute is allowed for each question.
- state that questions will be invited in the order in which they have been received and that if there is time remaining from the 15 minutes allowed for Public Question Time, questioners will be allowed to ask a supplementary question.

QUESTION ONE

From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Councillor Bower

Question

Examinations in Public normally happen once every 10 years or so. They are a very important stage in the plan making process, where developers, landowners, community representatives, other interested parties etc. are given the opportunity to comment on the Council's strategy to an independent planning Inspector.

For many of us at the recent EiP it was a refreshing change to make our comments to someone who was actually listening!

The Council's Local Plan has been a work in progress for something like 12 years, yet when the EiP occurred, somehow you found something more important to do! You did not attend (other than for 10 minutes to welcome the Inspector).

I am sure that you will have since seen the Inspector's letter in which he felt it necessary to warn the Council of the need to avoid predetermination.

I am concerned that, because you did not attend the EiP and listen to the views that were expressed there, you may not understand why the Inspector felt it necessary to issue this warning.

Can you please explain to the Council and public your understanding of why the Inspector found it necessary to issue this warning?

Response

Thank you for your question.

I had no control over the date set by the Planning Inspector for the EiP and so I found myself double booked with the EiP and compulsory development control training which Arun had already booked. Regarding the second day I had consulted with Officers and was advised the content of the EiP second day would be technical and my attendance would not be required. For the third day I had family commitments.

You refer to the issue of pre-determination. In the Inspectors letter to the Council in September 2015 he stated.

“I also consider it important to reiterate the point in paras 11-12 & 22 of my letter of 28 July (and para 12 of the appendix) – that the Council needs to be able to demonstrate that the issue of identifying ‘the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives’ (NPPF para 182) has been approached in an open-minded way. Reasonable alternatives for meeting the requirement which emerges from the forthcoming consultation need to be identified without risk of endangering the process by (a) any appearance of pre-determination or (b) over-reliance on the contents of the SA accompanying the submitted plan.”

The Council has taken on board these comments and the Council’s approach will be retested when the proposed modifications are examined in 2017.

QUESTION TWO

From Mr Chester to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Councillor Bower

Question

The Local Plan Sub-Committee on 1 September was provided a map showing some extensions to the Littlehampton Economic Growth Area Boundary. On the east side of the River Arun this includes the Linden Park recreation ground and Caffyns Field. Questioned in writing following the recent Parish Clerks briefing Officers replied to refer to the final LEGA study document to find the justification for the proposed extensions. That document simply states that the extensions are in order to ‘include the cluster of industrial buildings at Gloucester Road, Linden Park which are identified for redevelopment’. However, the revised boundaries cover a far greater area than that explanation would justify including two of the Towns previous green open spaces. Could the Cabinet Member therefore explain why the revised boundary goes way beyond the explanation given?”

Response

The first thing to say in response is that the document being referred to is a document prepared by a consultant to inform the Council and it is not a document of Council policy. It will inform the future policies in the Local Plan but, at this time, no decisions have been taken. If the Council considers that the boundaries need to change then they can change at the time a decision is taken.

The inclusion of Linden Park is because the study had identified the industrial units at Gloucester Road as a residential opportunity and the park could provide open space to serve this development. The boundary indicates the regeneration of this area and the retention of the green spaces are integral to ensuring the spatial strategy.

With the need to deliver a minimum of 1,000 homes at the West Bank – a figure contained within the submitted Local Plan - the site capacity work has shown that it might necessary to widen the boundary of the LEGA. The consultants therefore recommend that the LEGA boundary is amended on the Policies Map to include the revisions to the boundary at West Bank, which includes the less sensitive parcels adjacent to West Bank, and also to include the cluster of industrial buildings at Gloucester Road/Linden Park, which are identified for potential redevelopment.

QUESTION THREE

From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Councillor Bower

Question

You have argued against the housing numbers for this District at every stage of the Local Plan since the SE Plan was first published in 2009, which proposed what now seems a relatively modest housing target of 565 houses p.a. You have introduced delay after delay and wasted taxpayers' money on pointless and time consuming "critical friend" style reviews of the housing numbers.

While you were fiddling Rome was burning, and not surprisingly, the housing number has continued to climb – with an OAN now of 919 houses p.a. – 62% higher than if we had pressed on with the Local Plan in 2009 ... and this figure will almost certainly increase to over 1,000 houses p.a. when obligations under the Duty to Co-operate are factored in.

I am concerned that your negative and argumentative approach to plan making has unnecessarily delayed the Local Plan. I am also concerned that your failure to maintain a 5 Year Housing Land Supply has led to predatory development across the District.

I believe that if you had acted more responsibly, by facing up to difficult decisions earlier in the process, we could have had a Local Plan in place by now and at much lower housing levels.

As Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure do you accept any responsibility for the current state of affairs?

Response

Mr Dixon, you have served on this Council as a Councillor in the past and should be aware that the Cabinet structure is a democratic system and not an autocratic

one. I may be the person who gives voice to the decisions of Arun District Council when it comes to planning matters but I am by no means the person who decides what these decisions are.

The responsibility of representing the views of the electorate is one that every Member has to take on board. The majority of people in the Arun area do not want the quantity of housing being forced upon us by the Government. We have done our best to minimise the number of new houses being built and at the same time have a sufficient land supply to fight inappropriate developments.

It is a difficult balancing act. When things have gone to appeal we have sometimes lost. But I think you will find that this is true in many areas of the country, particularly those when the pressure is high and developers know that they can easily sell what they build and at a good price. We live in a particularly attractive area for developers and we have had some hard battles to fight.

Whatever the numbers in the local plan, the Government's determination to build more houses means that higher numbers would have been imposed upon us and who knows what the future might bring? In response to the concern of my fellow Councillors, the Leader and I have done our best to put a case for lower numbers. Our responsibility now is to ensure that the infrastructure is developed enough to cope with the extra numbers that are being imposed upon us. We also have a duty to protect the most valued aspects of the area and to prevent building on floodplains without adequate protections.

There is a great deal more to planning matters than simple housing numbers and I take very seriously the Council's responsibility to ensure that development in this area does as little damage as possible and that the views of the electorate are our guiding principle in this matter

QUESTION FOUR

From Mr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Councillor Bower

Question

The Local Plan is arguably the single most important duty of any planning authority.

Here in Arun, since 1 June 2015 there have been nine meetings of the Local Plan Sub-Committee. They do not last very long. In fact, the average duration of those nine meetings is a pathetic 36 minutes.

LPSC meetings	Start	Finish	Duration
19/10/2016	18:00	18:26	00:26
01/09/2016	18:00	18:34	00:34
30/06/2016	18:00	18:40	00:40
01/03/2016	18:00	18:50	00:50
19/01/2016	18:00	18:25	00:25
09/12/2015	18:00	18:25	00:25
20/10/2015	18:00	18:25	00:25
30/07/2015	18:00	18:40	00:40
01/06/2015	18:00	19:00	01:00
		Total	05:25
		Average	00:36

Those of us who sit in the public gallery marvel at the apparent lack of interest shown by the Councillors on this Committee.

Would you agree with me that the contribution of this Committee has become so insignificant that it might as well not exist?

If the Councillors cannot motivate themselves to make a meaningful contribution on this important issue is it time for the Government to step in?

Response

I am sure you would agree that meetings should last only as long as necessary. Members are provided with comprehensive reports. If Members believe that the reports answer the majority of the questions they have then naturally the number of questions asked is going to be minimal. Members are not in the habit of asking questions for the sake of it.