

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13th January 2020

Author: Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning.
- 1.2 A key purpose of the Scrutiny Committee function is to hold the Cabinet to account and ensure that Council priorities and performance are being delivered. The Scrutiny Committee partly fulfils this requirement through 'question and answer' sessions with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Question and Answer session is to ensure that the Cabinet Member provides the Scrutiny Committee with performance information that relates to their portfolio responsibilities. It also requires the Cabinet Member to provide budget information for their portfolio responsibilities and provides an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions on the portfolio responsibilities.
- 1.4 The remit of the Committee includes the review, scrutiny, and development of policy recommendations and the monitoring of performance of corporate priorities.

2. Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning,
- 2.2 Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning,
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning is Councillor Gary Sumner who is accountable for the following Pledges from the Council's Vision:
 - 3.1.1 Pledge 6:

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- Deliver infrastructure in a timely way to assist in phased housing and employment delivery for the New Eastern Villages including White Hart Junction and A420
 - Working with Barratt Homes through the Joint Venture, we will deliver the District Centre facilities including a public house, the next phases of housing, a retirement complex and education facilities – whilst also delivering new sections of canal
 - Create the southern access to Wichelstowe via a tunnel to be constructed under the M4 to link to Junction 16
 - Through the Local Plan review, identify brown field and green field sites for housing to deliver homes and employment land on a range of sustainable sites whilst ensuring that urban extensions are of the highest quality
 - Continue to work with the developers at Tadpole Garden Village to bring forward facilities to ensure a sustainable community can continue to thrive
 - Ensure that there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent
 - Work with Nationwide Building Society to deliver homes at the former Oakfield campus
 - Support final phases of additional housing at Badbury Park with community space and improvements to Day House Lane to link to Coate Water
- 3.1.2 Pledge 7: In addition to the two new free secondary schools, build one secondary and 13 primary schools to meet the needs of our increasing population
- 3.1.3 Pledge 15: Work to secure a viable and sustainable future for our key heritage assets.
- 3.2 The Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet Member include the following areas:
- 3.2.1 Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Framework Planning
 - 3.2.2 The New Eastern Villages
 - 3.2.3 Wichelstowe, Tadpole Garden Village and Badbury Park
 - 3.2.4 Neighbourhood Planning
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Richard Bell, Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage, Communities and Housing, rbell@swindon.gov.uk.

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3.2.5 Building Control, Local Land Charges and Street Naming & Numbering

3.2.6 Strategic flood and water management

Update on current priorities and key achievements

Delivering The Council's Vision and Pledges

3.3 Pledge 6.

During the year, strong progress has been made on Pledge 6, which is detailed elsewhere within this report

3.4 Pledge 7.

In the last year planning applications have been granted for the erection of a secondary school for special educational needs at Tadpole Garden Village and a new primary school at Badbury Park. The Deanery Secondary School opened in September in the Wichelstowe District Centre. The Kingfisher Primary School at Wichelstowe is under construction.

3.5 Pledge 15.

Over the last 12 months the Council has established a Heritage Action Zone to secure Historic England monies and expertise to transform the Railway Works and Railway Village areas into a vibrant, coherent heritage destination with a national profile.

Strategic Planning

3.6 I am committed to ensuring that Swindon receives the right development in the right locations. To achieve this, and to get back in control of our housing supply, I have been driving through the review of the Swindon Borough Local Plan, looking forward to 2036. Progress has been good. We published the Regulation 18 Draft of the Local Plan in the summer for consultation. This was followed by the Regulation 19 draft in December, the public consultation on which concludes on 31st January 2020. Having carefully considered all representations made to the Plan during this consultation period, and with the backing of the Council, I expect to be in a position to commend the Plan for Examination in late Spring \ early summer of 2020.

3.7 It is essential that the new Local Plan is based on a robust housing trajectory to maintain a reliable supply of housing. To this end, I have been keen to ensure that the new Plan allocates a portfolio of housing sites at a wider range of locations than its predecessor. I am also committed to ensuring that the Plan will

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deliver growth in a manner that brings tangible benefits to existing communities. By placing a reliance on a greater number of smaller housing sites, I believe that we can deliver the types of housing development that existing communities want, whilst at the same time providing a platform to enable investment in infrastructure that will benefit both new and existing residents.

- 3.8 The Plan also seeks to ensure that Swindon's economic growth is secured in a sustainable manner. The Town Centre is the most accessible location in the Borough by a range of modes of transport and investment in this area through new development is vital. The Plan also protects the strategically important employment site at Honda for industrial and business use.
- 3.9 I have also sought to ensure that the Local Plan responds to the challenge of Climate Change. The Plan seeks to establish a sustainable development pattern, to reduce travel distances by the private car, thereby contributing to achieving our air quality obligations. It also requires sustainable construction and energy efficiency in new buildings to accord with the most recent guidelines and for new housing and commercial developments to provide Electric Vehicle Charging Points. Increasing biodiversity is also an important aspect of the Local Plan, which will ensure that net gains are secured and carbon off-setting is built in to all schemes.
- 3.10 Supplementing the preparation of the new Local Plan, officers have been working on a number of further initiatives to place us on the front foot in shaping the future development of the Borough;
- (i) We are establishing an "Article 4 Direction" for the Town Centre, which will enable officers to proactively manage the conversion of offices to flats at key locations across the Town Centre. The Article 4 Direction will ensure that our best office stock is not lost, and that the quality of homes delivered is of a good standard and contributes to public realm improvements and affordable housing.
 - (ii) The Council continues to maintain a Self-Build Register, which is providing a robust evidence base to enable officers to bring forward additional sites for self-build and custom build housing schemes.
 - (iii) We have worked in partnership with Natural England on the new District Level Licensing Scheme for Great Crested Newts so that the long-term protection of this species is improved whilst positively enabling planned growth. Swindon's proactive work on this project has put us ahead of almost the entire country. The formal launch of this innovative scheme will take place in early spring 2020.
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- (iv) The Planning Team have undertaken a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) which identifies sites that are likely to be suitable for housing and employment land and assesses their likelihood of delivery during the Local Plan period. The SHELAA is kept under review and calls for additional sites are made from time to time, ensuring that our planning policies are relevant and up to date.
- (v) We have visited communities during this process to explain the rationale for draft site allocations and continue to engage with communities to ensure that they are with us on the choice of sustainable locations for growth.
- (vi) Underlining the Council's commitment to enable local communities to influence development in their area, the Council has provided support on the progression of following Neighbourhood Plans in the last year:
 - a. Hannington (adopted)
 - b. Stratton (in preparation)
 - c. Blunsdon (in preparation)

New Eastern Villages

- 3.11 The co-ordination of development at the New Eastern Villages continues to provide a challenge. Here land for around 8,000 homes, business, education, leisure and community facilities is allocated for development. This land is in over one hundred separate ownerships and requires strategic infrastructure to enable it to come forward.
- 3.12 In the last year officers have consented a site at Redlands and Rowborough (a large strategic allocation north of the A420) has authorisation to grant. Completion of the legal agreement is imminent. Two other strategic sites at Lotmead and Great Stall East are subject to live applications and determination of both is anticipated in the first half of this year.
- 3.13 The access strategy for the NEV is complex, but I have secured external funding from the LEP (via the Local Growth Fund) for improvements to Gablecross, White Hart and Piccadilly roundabouts and the Nythe Road \ Oxford Road junction on the A420. These schemes are moving forward on time. Works were undertaken at White Hart Junction over the Christmas period with Network Rail possessions, in order to enable the groundworks to be completed in readiness for the improved junction.

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- 3.14 We have been awarded £48.7m from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) to deliver the strategic transport improvements and a £19m Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) grant for the delivery of the Southern Connector Road. Additional transport improvements will be delivered by developers in line with new development, and managed through the development management and financial contribution (S106) framework.
- 3.15 We have a Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry at the end of this month to ensure that the assembly of a small number of outstanding parcels of land to deliver the Southern Connector Road is completed.
- 3.16 We have secured a £750,000 Great Western Community Forest s106 contribution from the Symmetry Park development. This is the first development to contribute the Green Infrastructure of the New Eastern Villages. Officers are working with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to create nature reserves as an integral part of the expansion area. These nature reserves will provide biodiversity gain and new outdoor recreation opportunities for residents of the Borough.
- 3.17 The NEV officer team covers a wide range of disciplines from planning to scheme development. Their task is complex and they work with integrity and enthusiasm. I was delighted to attend the Employee Recognition Awards last month when the NEV team were deservedly recognised as the 'Team of the Year' as well as recognition for our Conservation officer

Wichelstowe

- 3.18 This year has seen two significant community milestones with the opening of the Hall & Woodhouse pub in February 2019 and the Deanery CE Academy in September 2019. A range of community events have been held throughout the year, including the Wichelstowe Games in August and the recent Christmas event.
- 3.19 The Deanery Secondary School has hosted BBC's Question Time within the specially design theatre. Local sports clubs are also using the excellent indoor and outdoor facilities creating activity into the after school period and supporting the evening economy. The Kingfisher Primary School is under construction and the double height colonnade of this building further supports the attractive, high quality architecture at the District Centre.
- 3.20 In terms of construction within Canalside, this year saw the completion of 500m of new highway, restoration of a section of the Wilts & Berks canal, and the new landmark footbridge and Public Square.

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- 3.21 The first transfer of residential development land to Wichelstowe LLP took place in June 2019 and housebuilding commenced on the initial 208 units in August 2019. A successful sales launch took place in October with 12 properties being reserved during the first week of sales. Steady sales have continued and the first roofs were installed before Christmas.
- 3.22 I believe that the District Centre is turning out to be a great success, with high quality buildings and public realm coming together to create a destination with a unique sense of place. I have asked officers to put the District Centre forward for a RTPI award, to provide Wichelstowe with the national attention it deserves and as a showcase for the excellent schemes we are delivering in Swindon.
- 3.23 Officers are also managing the implementation of a further three urban extensions:
- (i) Badbury Park – Housing provision within this development has remained ahead of the Local Plan trajectory and in September 2019 the Primary School was opened within temporary accommodation. The permanent school is under construction and on track for opening in 2020. Officers have also dealt with a “Phase 3” application increasing the potential number of houses here to up to 1,190.
 - (ii) Tadpole Garden Village – Officers have won awards for their collaborative work on this development. The housing provision has also come forward ahead of the Local Plan trajectory and the high sales values attained have meant affordable housing is provided at the 30% Local Plan target. 14 plots for custom build housing were approved last month. The application for the Public House was submitted in December and the remaining sports provision proposals are likely to come forward early this year. The new community at Tadpole, continues to thrive having recently won silver in the Royal Horticultural Society’s Britain in Bloom competition and the success of the Community Interest Company there has attracted interest from other authorities as a model of good practice.
 - (iii) Kingsdown – We were unsuccessful in securing Housing Infrastructure Funding towards a new bridge to support delivery of Kingsdown, but are continuing to work with MHCLG to secure support to deliver the infrastructure needed to unlock this urban extension. Negotiations with Persimmons continue on an outline planning application for 1,650 homes.

Planning Applications and development

- 3.24 It has been a very busy year for the Planning Department beyond the Local Plan review and our urban extensions. Officers continue to manage a high
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volume of planning applications including strategic town expansion schemes and several potentially game-changing regeneration schemes.

- 3.25 Highlights for the year include the granting of permission for a new office HQ at Kimmerfields; a new £2.5m pavilion and sports complex at the County Ground; a 239 home scheme (including a new community hub public, open space, and play facilities) at Oakfield, and a scheme for the demolition of substandard flats and replacement with 149 new homes at George Gay Gardens on Queen's Drive.
- 3.26 Planning Officers continue to work collaboratively with developers to progress schemes on a number of sites across Swindon Town Centre in support of the centre's regeneration, including the development of the Tented Market Site, Aspen House, the next phase of Carriage Works and the bus boulevard (Fleming Way).

Government Performance Measures

- 3.27 The Government assesses the performance of Local Planning Authorities on their turnaround times on planning applications and on their success rates at Appeal.
- 3.28 I am pleased to report that the service is performing well against both of these indicators, having determined over 90% of applications within the Government's target determination periods (8 weeks for a minor and 13 weeks for a major application, 16 weeks for an application with an Environmental Impact Assessment).

Infrastructure Planning

- 3.29 The planning system provides a means of securing developer contributions for infrastructure. This comes in the form of S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy monies to mitigate development impacts on public services and facilities. For site-specific infrastructure, in financial year 2018/2019, the Council receipted £11,399,906 of s106 payments, earmarked for improvements to essential infrastructure. In financial year 2019/20 (in the period April to December 2019) a further £3,356,802 of s106 payments has been received. The Council's Community Infrastructure Levy is now starting to bed in as a way of funding the delivery of 'pooled' infrastructure. In 2018/19 the Council secured £1,674,176 in CIL receipts. Of this total for 2018/19, £249,995 was passed to Parish/Town Councils through the CIL "Neighbourhood Proportion" mechanism. In financial year 2019/20 (in the period April to December 2019) the Council has secured a further £950,488 in CIL receipts.

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- 3.30 By 31st December 2020 the Council is required to publish a report on how S106 and CIL are being allocated to deliver infrastructure improvements. To enable us to be in a position to do this, we are introducing a new back office system for the management of CIL and S106 receipts, which will provide greater transparency on the monies receipted and how the monies are being spent to improve Swindon's infrastructure. We continue to support the Parish Councils in ensuring robust governance in the allocation of "Neighbourhood Proportion" monies.

Building Control, Land Charges and Street Naming & Numbering

- 3.31 The Building Control Service continues to secure the majority of major commercial and regeneration schemes coming forward in the Borough. The service is advising a number of the Borough's major employers, including BD Medical, Catalent, BMW, McArthur Glen, Patheon, The Research Councils, and GW Hospital on how their buildings can be extended or adapted to meet changing needs.
- 3.32 The back office systems of the Land Charges Service have been overhauled to enable the service to become fully digitised.
- 3.33 The Street Naming and Numbering service is a new addition to my portfolio. I am seeking to ensure that this service operates in manner that ensures that fees cover costs. This will enable the service to operate without subsidy.

Strategic flood and water management

- 3.34 As Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act, flood risk is managed by the Council through its Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) approved by Cabinet in 2014. The National long-term Strategy produced by the Environment Agency is currently delayed until further notice, therefore the decision has been made to update our LFRMS to be in-line with the key focus areas of the draft National Strategy.
- 3.35 Highway & Transport's flood risk team has worked alongside Planning Policy team to update the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment linked to the Local Plan review. This will strengthen Swindon's stance on surface water flood risk, giving it equal weighting to fluvial flood risk.
- 3.36 The LLFA are handling over 450 applications a year with this significantly increasing each year, 95% of which are responded to within the 21 day time limit set by legislation. The team currently handle each application multiple times due to lack of understanding from some developers. To help reduce the number of iterations received as well as the time each application is handled,

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the team are building standard responses and working with Transport Development Management to provide guidance and best practice within the Transport Requirements for Development.

- 3.37 Covingham and Nythe Flood Alleviation Scheme is being progressed with help from the EA's Project Delivery Unit (PDU). The initial data gather has been completed and Jacobs (PDU's chosen consultant) are building the integrated fluvial and surface water model to represent the flood risk. This modelling work is timetabled for completion by May 2020.

Planning as an enabler

- 3.38 Development Briefs for the Head of Property Assets have been prepared on four sites to ensure that planning considerations are taken into account at an early stage of scheme development. This has helped the Council's Property team in marketing sites and/or delivering schemes with certainty over the Council's planning requirements.
- 3.39 The specialist skills in the Planning Team have been recognised by external partners through commissions to provide training, to give expert advice on Regional and National Panels and to produce a range of planning documents to enable development and support neighbourhood plans. This not only results in improved guidance for developers but it also supports the expertise we have in house and provides an additional, valuable income source for the Planning Team.
- 3.40 The Planning Team has overseen implementation of the Swindon Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), which was launched in June 2019. The aim of the HAZ is to enable the Railway Works and Railway Village areas to become a vibrant visitor destination with a national profile. This in turn will support the wider regeneration of Central Swindon and burnish civic pride. The HAZ is being managed through a joint Council / Historic England project team, supported by a Project Officer. The Project Officer, who is employed by the Council but funded by Historic England, was the 2019 winner of the prestigious RTPI South West Young Planner of the Year Award.
- 3.41 Key workstreams for the HAZ include delivery of schemes that will enhance routes into and around the HAZ area, realising the potential of vacant and under-used buildings in the area (such as the Health Hydro, the Cricketers Arms, and the Mechanics Institute), and rebranding the HAZ area to enable the Railway Works and Railway Village to become a heritage destination with a national profile.

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- 3.42 The Council has teamed up with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to deliver the Forest Meadows Project, a three-year programme which will include 12 sites in Swindon covering more than 170 hectares. Most of the meadow and forest sites are located along the corridor of the River Ray, but the project will also link to other parts of Swindon, including Sevenfields and Lawns. Existing meadows will be sustained by the establishment of annual maintenance programmes and other locations will be managed more intensely with existing vegetation being stripped away and re-sowed and planted with wildflowers. Grazing animals such as cattle could also be introduced on some of the areas in order to enhance biodiversity.

What would you do differently?

- 3.43 The NEV continues to be a very difficult urban extension to facilitate. The NEV remains the most sustainable option for delivering the level of growth required at Swindon but also requires developers to work together to deliver strategic infrastructure, which has to be overlain across multiple land ownerships. The NEV is nothing like previous urban extensions at Swindon, which are in single or at worst dual ownership. The level of challenge in delivering a sustainable co-ordinated scheme at the NEV should not be underestimated. With hindsight the NEV co-ordination work could have been resourced in a different way to reduce pressure on the small team who have worked over and above expectations to get the NEV to the cusp of delivery.
- 3.44 The decision to grant planning permission for 8 dwellings and an employment building at Land at Manor Farm, Hannington was subject to a legal challenge. The Council was required to pay £6,000 in costs, following legal advice that the LPA had not properly grappled with the “tilted balance” assessment of the scheme’s impact on heritage assets. Following on from this decision, to prevent future legal challenges, the LPA has amended its approach to assessing schemes where there is an impact on heritage assets so as to avoid further threats of Judicial Review.
- 3.45 The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Review was a resource intensive piece of work. Public engagement enabled early considerations of potential local plan allocations, but its status as an evidence base document was not clear to the public. It is, of course important to move the Local Plan review forward rapidly so that we are not hostage to fortune on 5 year land supply. The lack of a 5 year land supply has left us vulnerable to schemes at locations that we would not necessarily wish to see developed, and which don’t provide the critical strategic mass to viably assist in infrastructure provision.

What are the Challenges and Priorities facing your Portfolio?

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- 3.46 There are a number of challenges facing several aspects of the portfolio. Although fees cover costs of the Development Management process, resourcing remains tight and the service is now geared to focus on its statutory functions. Specific challenges exist in the following areas;
- 3.46.1 Land supply – move the new Local plan to adoption without delay to ensure that we have a 5 year supply of housing land at the earliest opportunity.
 - 3.46.2 Infrastructure – continue to ensure that Swindon is well placed to secure external funding for essential infrastructure, in particular that which alleviates existing problems and enables strategic housing delivery
 - 3.46.3 Honda site - ensure that the site has a viable future as a redevelopment opportunity that meets Swindon's employment needs and contributes positively to quality of life
 - 3.46.4 A Flexible resource – manage and support the planning teams development to ensure that staff are multi skilled and have the flexibility to operate in a variety of roles. It is now more important than ever to prove that the public get value for money from planning in Swindon whilst developing talent and ensuring residents benefit from the highest calibre, well trained officers, and benchmarking exercises will enable us to view how Swindon performs against other local authorities.
 - 3.46.5 Unlocking difficult schemes – I will continue to work with strategic providers to bring forward schemes that will derive local benefits and deliver infrastructure improvements to enable new homes and businesses to come forward.
 - 3.46.6 CIL/S106 - The Council holds CIL and S106 receipts from developments in the Borough. New CIL reporting requirements are a catalyst for reviewing how we make S106 and CIL contributions more visible. Work is in hand to redesign our CIL / S106 back office systems to enable meaningful reports to be produced and agreements interrogated with ease.
 - 3.46.7 Enforcement – The Planning enforcement function deals with complaints about unauthorised land use and schemes not being built in accord with approved plans. The team is small and their work is both triaged and prioritised with respect to harm caused. The team's workload is likely to increase as we take a more proactive approach to

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dealing with untidy sites and buildings, and officers are considering how resources may be bolstered in this area.

3.46.8 Gypsy and traveller site – We have a responsibility to plan proactively to meet housing needs. This includes a requirement to find land for a gypsy and traveller site(s) to meet needs. The Local Plan provides a policy framework within which to consider applications for gypsy and traveller sites.

3.46.9 Parishes – The Council has a role in supporting Parish Councils in the production of Neighbourhood Plans, to equip Parishes with the skills to enable them to proactively plan for their communities, and to make the most meaningful and effective contributions that they can to planning applications

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The Committee can choose not to operate a Cabinet Portfolio Question and Answer session system.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act requires every local authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor, and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

5.3 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by it.

Diversity Impact Assessment

5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment is required at this stage. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

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Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The author has consulted, where appropriate, with Corporate Directors, Directors, Heads of Service, other officers, and relevant partners on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None.