

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning Q&A Report

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19th November 2018

Author: Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to question the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning on his portfolio responsibilities and performance.
- 1.2. A key purpose of the Scrutiny function is to hold Cabinet to account and to ensure that Council and partners' priorities and performance are being delivered.
- 1.3. Members of the Committee are reminded that all Members of the Cabinet are required to come before the Scrutiny Committee to take part in a Question and Answer session that will focus on the full remit of their portfolio. Scrutiny Committee is therefore encouraged to focus Question and Answer sessions with Members of specific topics and/or services in order to avoid duplication.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1. Note the report by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning.
- 2.2. Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, and decide whether any further action is required.
- 2.3. The Leader of the Council has assigned the following responsibilities to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Gary Sumner.
 - Have overview of the Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Planning Framework
 - Provide political leadership for the New Eastern Villages programme
 - Promote Sustainability
 - Have overview of the Wichelstowe Joint Venture
 - Set the direction for future strategic infrastructure programmes to support economic growth
 - Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.
- 2.4. In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning is responsible for the delivery of pledges 3, 4, 6, 15 and 16 in pursuance of the Council's Vision.

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3. Detail

- 3.1 I have held this portfolio since May. Inevitably strategic planning takes place over a long period of time. Major strategic development has significant lead-in times, ensuring that homes, jobs and infrastructure are delivered in the right place at the right time. The Council as Planning Authority can only create the environment for schemes to be delivered. Major development is generally led by the private sector. Strategic housebuilding is a particular issue where the Council is very much reliant on those controlling the market to deliver. In this context elements of my portfolio have worked well, whilst in others I have identified potential for projects to be looked at through a new lens.

What have we done well?

Planning Performance

1. Planning performance continues to be good, despite a reduction in staff. Determination statistics remain high, thanks to a committed and professional team. Priority remains on transformational strategic schemes which deliver the biggest change for Swindon. We continue to oppose poor development and I am delighted to say that we recently won a long and complex appeal against our refusal of strategic development at Lotmead Farm, East of Swindon. The Inspector considered our case to be sufficiently strong to award full costs in our favour, in addition to dismissing the appeal.

Proactive delivery

2. Through an independently evaluated assessment, the Local Plan establishes a land supply requirement equating to a number of new homes that need to be built in the Borough each year over the Plan period. Government guidance requires us to maintain a supply of deliverable sites equivalent to 5 years supply of homes at these levels. This may include sites under construction, those with planning consent or authorisation to grant, and those allocated in up to date plans or identified in documents that inform plans, to which there is no incumbrance to development. Currently Swindon cannot prove a 5 year supply of housing sites, and so is vulnerable to ad hoc housing development in unallocated locations. The lack of a 5 year supply is largely a function of under delivery on strategic sites. Accordingly, to assist in bringing more sites to market, I have worked with officers to undertake a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment, (SHELAA), to identify a range of small and medium sized sites, which can be delivered in the short term. This work has gone well, and I have sought to undertake the process in an open and transparent manner, involving Ward Councillors throughout. The list of initial SHELAA sites was published at the start of October, and once consultation responses have been reviewed,

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those sites that progress to the next stage will assist in reducing our 5 year land supply gap, helping to put us back in control of applications in our area.

I want to ensure that we continue to improve both the quality of development coming forward. I am pleased to advise that Swindon is gaining a reputation as a location where high quality design is expected. Major development schemes routinely undergo an independent design review process. The highly successful Tadpole Garden Villages, discussed later in this report, demonstrates the value of proactive working with developers to improve design quality.

3. Local Plan Review and Joint Working

I continue to work with officers on the Local Plan Review, which is due to be finalised in 2021 following several rounds of consultation, local engagement and examination. The revised National Planning Policy Framework has put a greater emphasis ensuring that Local Planning Authorities bring forward suitable, viable and deliverable development. The SHELAA is the first stage in this process. We are also working with the statutory agencies and infrastructure providers to ensure the revised Local Plan is deliverable both in the short and long-term.

I continue to liaise with Members of Wiltshire Council on strategic planning matters to ensure a joint approach to planning on cross-border matters.

4. Neighbourhood Plans

I continue to support Neighbourhood Plans and applaud Parish Councils who bring them forward. I am delighted that in September the Hannington Neighbourhood Plan was approved at local referendum and was adopted by Council on 8th November 2018. In addition Stratton St Margaret Parish Council and Blunsdon Parish Council are making good progress in bringing forward their Neighbourhood Plans

5. Wichelstowe

I have continued to work with officers to deliver the first phase of development in the district centre at Wichelstowe (see Appendix 2). The infrastructure contracts (new road and canal) are coming to an end and have been delivered in time to support adjoining development. Significant progress has been made on the drafting of the s106 planning agreement to secure the necessary additional infrastructure to support the development.

The Wichelstowe District Centre phase continues apace. The landmark Hall and Woodhouse pub/restaurant is nearing completion and is due to open in early 2019. The secondary school is on track to open in September 2019 and planning permission has been granted for the new primary school. The canal

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restoration, and a new footbridge and public square are all clearly visible on site and on target for completion. Subject to planning approval of Reserved Matters, housing delivery within the District Centre is expected to commence in Spring 2019.

The procurement process for the Wichelstowe Southern Access and tunnel under the M4 is in progress. Construction is programmed to commence late summer 2019.

6. New Eastern Villages (NEV)

I continue to work with officers and a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the delivery of a sustainable new community at the largest of our new development areas. Following the Lotmead Farm decision, we continue to focus on the need for high quality development at the NEV, and work is ongoing with land promoters and house-builders through the pre-application and planning process. Significant progress has been made on the drafting of S106 planning agreements to secure the necessary additional infrastructure to support the development north of the A420 at South Marston and Rowborough (2,380 homes) and at Redlands Airfield (370 homes). A new planning application for development at Lotmead Farm is expected in the New Year. At Great Stall East we continue to work with the developers to bring land forward in an acceptable and timely manner.

The new shared footway/cycleway at Symmetry Park has been completed along with significant landscaping, and a reserved matters application Phase 2 of the site is expected before the end of the year.

Significant progress has also been made on the comprehensive access strategy for the NEV, with support from the Department of Transport (DfT), Homes England (HE) and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Detailed business cases for improvements at White Hart Junction and Southern Connector Road (grant funded) will be submitted to the DfT and HE in December for approval, and early contractor involvement in scheme design has ensured robust challenge and risk mitigation including deliverability and costs.

Given the scale and complexity of development, various liaison groups have been established which continue to meet on a regular basis with a particular focus on infrastructure delivery. These include the Strategic Health Partnership with Great Western Hospital, Care Commissioning Group, and Emergency Services, A420 Business Users Group, Parish and adjacent Authorities.

The NEV masterplan is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

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7. Tadpole Garden Villages and Badbury Park

Build out of new homes at Tadpole Garden Village and Badbury Park continues apace. At Badbury, a scheme for an additional 300 homes is being progressed on land previously earmarked for employment use. At Tadpole, planning permission has just been granted for an additional 2 form entry primary school (to be called William Morris School) on land next to the Secondary School. In recognition of its high design quality, Tadpole Garden Villages has won a prestigious, national planning award.

8. Town Centre Regeneration

Planning Officers continue to support the regeneration of Central Swindon. Officers have been assisting in the bringing forward of a number of schemes in the Central Area, including the Snowdome at North Star and Kimmerfields. Officers are striving to ensure that the best possible developments come forward on these important sites. Officers are experiencing a significant increase in pre-application enquiries in Central Swindon. There is a real buzz around the centre of town, which bodes well for delivering the much needed regeneration of the centre.

9. Community Infrastructure Levy and Infrastructure Delivery

We continue to secure S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to help pay for the infrastructure needed to support new development. In this financial year, up to 30th September 2018, £5,324,608 in S106 monies has already been received to support the delivery of enhanced infrastructure in the Borough.

In this financial year up to 30th September 2018 the Council has already received £850,539.19 of CIL payments. £127,109.09 of these receipts will have been transferred to the relevant Parish Councils by the end of October 2018.

My officers are also helping to deliver major infrastructure improvements on the ground, including major transport schemes such as the upgrades to Junctions 15 and 16.

10. Building Control

The Hackett Review following the Grenfell tragedy has recommended a number of changes to how the Building Regulations are enforced in the UK. Swindon's Building Control team is enacting these changes to further enhance its service. The quality of the Building Regulations advice provided by the Council's Building Control Team is demonstrated through the team's success in picking up new work. The Team has recently secured its 40th "partner" business, and is now partnered with many of Swindon's largest

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employers, ranging from major retailers such as the Outlet Centre through to manufacturers such as BMW, and also with the large majority of RIBA Architects in the Borough.

11. Strategic Flood Risk

As Lead Local Flood Authority under the Flood and Water Management Act, flood risk is managed by the Council through its Local Flood Risk Management Strategy approved by Cabinet in 2014. The strategy is due to be updated this year pending advice from the Environment Agency's National long-term strategy to ensure we are in-line with best practice. Highway & Transport's flood risk team is also working alongside Planning Policy team to update the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment linked to the Local Plan review.

The Lead Local Flood Authority are handling over 400 applications a year with this significantly increasing each year, 93% 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, officers are working with Wiltshire Council to adopt a SuDS Guide which will help developers understand the information that must be submitted at each step of the planning process.

Covingham and Nythe Flood Alleviation Scheme is being progressed with help from the EA's Project Delivery Unit, we are currently agreeing the legal terms of the partnership working. The desktop feasibility study has been completed and the project is now moving into the next phase of feasibility.

12. Landscape

The Landscape Team has been working on a number of projects to enhance the Borough's green infrastructure and leisure offer. The Team has managed the Moredon Sports Hub and County Ground pavilion schemes from inception through to the planning stage.

The latest phase of planting for the off-site mitigation area for Wichelstowe at Common Farm is now completed. A new 8ha woodland has been created and used as a showcase example by the Forestry Commission.

Officers have been working with the Woodland Trust to create a new 3ha woodland at Pack Hill, Wanborough. Enabling access works are complete and the first planting is scheduled for the 29th November. All planting is scheduled to be complete by the end of the winter. The work is being sponsored by Nationwide Building Society and their volunteers will be planting the trees.

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The Trees for Learning scheme is now in its second year. This is a scheme funded nationally through DEFRA. It is part of DEFRA's 1M trees for schools programme. Schools are offered free trees and advice for tree planting in school grounds via the Community Forest. So far, over 1000 trees ('whips') have been planted in school grounds with further planting planned for this winter.

Officers have submitted proposals to the GWR biodiversity off-setting scheme (part of the electrification programme). If the bid is successful the work would see enhancements to sites at Mouldon Hill and Rivermead. We have been told an announcement should be made within the next few weeks.

Working with the Wildlife Trust, officers have developed proposals for a 'Magnificent Meadows' reaching across Swindon and closely associated with our urban woodland network. A funding bid to HLF has been unsuccessful. Valuable work however was completed in pulling the bid together and work continues to see how such a project can develop over the next year or so.

Research published earlier in the year highlighted the low urban tree canopy cover in Swindon in comparison with other towns and cities in the UK. Officers have been in discussions with the Woodland Trust and the Forest of Avon (Bristol) to pull together joint proposals for a 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approach to address underlying issues. The Landscapae Team has been successful in securing through the first sift of projects with the intention to be part of a joint bid for funding in the first half of 2019.

What could I have done better?

- 3.2 The NEV is a hugely complex development, which is planned to comprise several individual communities separated by farmland but linked by infrastructure. Swindon has a proud history of delivering town expansion and the recent successful developments at Tadpole Farm and Badbury Park stand testament to that. The NEV has presented a different challenge, with the involvement of many landowners, agents, land promoters and planning consultants. The planning system does not make it easy to co-ordinate strategic development with such a range of interests, particularly where infrastructure costs are both high, and shared across several schemes. Whilst significant up front work has been undertaken with the aim of drawing these layers of interest together, and high quality infrastructure bids have been submitted with the support of partner agencies such as Homes England and Highways England, infrastructure provision remains a challenge, with short term gap funding the major stumbling point. Whilst the scale of the challenge is understandable, an alternative strategy spreading our development across a wider range of small and medium sized sites, as well as strategic extensions, may have provided greater certainty around ongoing housing delivery.

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- 3.3 Whilst infrastructure and commercial development is underway at Wichelstowe, there has been a delay in bringing forward housing development. I have successfully overseen the arrangements for transferring the first residential parcels into the Wichelstowe Joint Venture to secure a significant return for the Council and ensure house building gets underway in early 2019.

Challenges for the Portfolio

- 3.4 The Council's financial situation remains challenging. Although largely self-funding through planning fees, the core planning function faces the same financial restraint as other parts of the Council. Inevitably, this will mean that the service is likely to become more stretched, which in turn may impact on our ability to make timely decisions. My challenge is to work with senior staff to ensure that key projects remain appropriately resourced and that external funding sources are maximised, both to deliver continuity of service and unlock critical infrastructure funding streams.
- 3.5 The pace of housing delivery and a lack of land for employment opportunities continue to present challenges. Work has begun on a new Local Plan, which will allow us to review our development strategy and delivery profile. This will provide a wider portfolio of employment land, aiding choice and helping keep local employers in the town. The SHELAA process will be kept under review and assist in diversifying the range, type and location of housing options for the future. Aligned to this, I am keen to keep the planning framework for some of our strategic extensions under review, again to ensure that development is aligned to infrastructure and to bring housing forward in the locations we want, at the time we want.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Committee could choose not to operate Cabinet Member Question and Answer sessions.

5 Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications arising as a result of this report. Any expenditure arising as a result of an item on the Committee's work programme will be met by the Overview and Scrutiny Support budget, subject to the approval of the Committee.

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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 as a result of the report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

Diversity Impact Assessment

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

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 Scrutiny Committee.

6 Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7 Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – New Eastern Villages

Appendix 2 - Wichelstowe

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Appendix 1 – The New Eastern Villages Planning Update

Planning Update

Symmetry Park

Roads appeal (written reps)

Next Step: Awaiting decision

St Margaret's Park

Appeal pending

Next Step: Awaiting appeal dates

Upper Lotmead Village

Next Step: PPA/Pre-app discussions for residential

Lotmead Farm (Ainscough)

2,600 homes

Next Step: PPA/Pre-app then resubmission expected late 2018



North of A420 (HHT)

2,380 homes (23% AH)

Next Step: Agree S106, grant permission Winter 2018/19
Expect reserved matters app - 2019

Great Stall East (Capital Land)

1,800 homes, schools etc.

Next Step: Dependent on information received:
Deadline - End of Oct 2018

Redlands Airfield (Barberry)

370 homes (23% AH)

Resolution to grant
Next Step: Agree S106 then grant permission - Winter 2018/19
Expect reserved matters 2019

Communities & Housing



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Appendix 2 – Wichelstowe District Centre

Wichelstowe District Centre Phase 1 October 2018



1	JV Residential (Sold by Barratt Homes)	Circa 109 residential units (mix of flats and houses), planning to be submitted Nov 18, start on site Spring 2019
2	JV Residential (Sold by David Wilson Homes)	Circa 100 residential units (mix of flats and houses), planning to be submitted Nov 18, start on site Spring 2019
3	Freeman Homes (Older People's Housing)	Circa 185 residential apartments and shared facilities (restaurant/swimming pool), start on site Spring 2019
4	Deanery CE Academy	Secondary school with 6 th form, opening to year 7 pupils in September 2019
5	Kingfisher CE Academy	Primary school and nursery, construction to commence summer 2019 for a September 2020 opening
6	Hall and Woodhouse pub	Building nearing completion, opening Jan / Feb 2019
7	New Highway	Highway and junction improvements, due for completion Dec 2018
8	Canal Restoration	Restoration of existing Wilts & Berks Canal and new towpath / habitat creation due for completion Feb 19.
9	New footbridge & square	Construction underway, due for completion March 2019
10	Landscaping Works	New footpath links, tree planting and habitat creation to be completed winter 2019.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Richard Bell, 01793 466706, rbell@swindon.gov.uk.