

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

Q and A Report

Scrutiny

Date: 12th September 2016

Author:	Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	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 ensure that Council and partner's 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 on 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
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Leader of the Council has assigned the following responsibilities to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Toby Elliott.
 - Strategic Planning and Development Framework Planning
 - The New Eastern Villages
 - Neighbourhood Planning
 - Building Control and Local Land Charges
 - Housing Strategy

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Richard Bell, Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage on (01793) 466706 or by e-mail at rbell@swindon.gov.uk.

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- Design –based consultancy
- Superfast Broadband
- Wichelstowe (Commercialisation).

3.2 In overseeing these areas, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning is responsible for the delivery for the following pledges in pursuance of the Councils Priority one: Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy:

3.2.1 Pledge 1: Deliver the Government standard Superfast Broadband coverage to all commercial and domestic premises in the Borough by 2017.

3.2.2 Pledge 2: Construct solar arrays on Council-owned land at Common Farm, Chapel Farm and a solar noise barrier along roads including the M4 at Wichelstowe.

3.2.3 Pledge 9: Develop Council-owned brownfield sites at Oakfield, and other sites as they become available for housing.

3.2.4 Pledge 14: With Barratt Homes we will build up to 3,500 homes in Wichelstowe including the development of a district centre.

3.3 Councillor Elliott has held responsibility for strategic planning since May 2015, and for Wichelstowe since May 2016.

What have you done?

Strategic Spatial Planning and Neighbourhood Plans

3.4 I am committed to ensuring that Swindon gets the right sort of development in the right place. This means supporting a vibrant economy and creating truly sustainable communities. Having a strong and up to date Local Plan in place helps ensure that we are able to do this. Our current Local Plan is a good document, but it has rapidly become overtaken by events. Notwithstanding positive housing completions of 1442 for 2015-16 many houses with planning permission are not built out as quickly as they should be. I am overseeing a number of pieces of work to accelerate the housebuilding that we have planned for and protect communities from inappropriate development that we do not want. The Review of the Local Plan is important to give us an up to date framework enabling us to plan proactively for Swindon's future. Inevitably, constraints are likely to dictate that some of Swindon's housing growth may have to be met in Wiltshire. A number of key evidence base works have been commissioned,

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including some jointly with Wiltshire, to inform the review with appropriate and robust justification, which are now nearing completion including:

- A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (jointly commissioned with Wiltshire Council)
- A Functional Economic Market Area Assessment (jointly commissioned with Wiltshire Council)
- An Employment Land Review
- A Retail & Leisure Study

- 3.5 Since there are few areas left within the Council boundaries that are suitable for future development, it is essential that we continue to have good relations with neighbouring authorities such as Wiltshire so that we can meet ongoing housing needs.
- 3.6 These studies will provide us with the key information on which to base our plans for the period to 2036, including the amount of additional housing, employment and commercial land required to meet future needs. Without a robust evidence we would struggle to review the Local Plan in a manner that is sound, and delivers the Council's aspirations for a prosperous, growing low-carbon economy.
- 3.7 In addition, it has been a great honour to have been part of the Local Plans Expert Group established by the then Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government, Greg Clark MP, and overseen by the then Minister for Housing & Planning, Brandon Lewis MP. The remit was to consider how local plan making can be made more efficient and effective. My appointment on this group was an acknowledgement of the work by the Borough Council in respect of the recently adopted Local Plan which ensured it had a successful examination in public. The Group reported to the Secretary of State in March 2016, and we await his successor's decision on how its recommendations are to be taken forward.
- 3.8 Following a local referendum in June in which 87% of the electorate were in favour, the **Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan** was adopted by the Council on July 14th 2016 (Council Minute 35, 2016/17 refers). This is the first such Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted in the Borough and only one of about 100 nationally to have reached this stage. This underlines the Council's commitment to enable local communities to influence development in their area. Six other neighbourhood plans are progressing in the Borough, of which the South Marston Village Plan is currently at examination, and I expect three of the others will be submitted for examination before the end of the year. My officers are continuing to give support to the Parish and Town councils in developing their

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neighbourhood plans, and a recent appointment has been made to give more dedicated support in the future. This is something I would urge local communities to pursue fully, it gives more surety of planning within your area and can lead to an increased value of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts.

Development Management

- 3.9 The Council continues to work closely with Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) to help invigorate and drive regeneration of Central Swindon. The implementation of the Town Centre Masterplan continues with work focussed around Kimmerfields and prioritising schemes that will deliver visible high impact change as quickly as possible. A successful Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) public enquiry around land at Fleming Way has removed a barrier to redevelopment at Kimmerfields, where the Health Centre is under construction.
- 3.10 The Council participated in the Government's Brownfield Register Pilot project. The aim of the Brownfield Register is to facilitate the development of suitable development sites for housing and increase choice. The Government has expressed its gratitude to Swindon for our contribution to this important pilot project. The outcomes of the brownfield pilot inform the work of undertaken to identify potential underused land for housing detailed in paragraph 3.19 of this report. I have made a pledge that when all of our reviews are finished I will seek meetings with Borough Councillors to ensure they are fully aware of potential planning within each ward and see if we can engage communities earlier in the process.
- 3.11 The Council is seeking to improve both the quantity and quality of development coming forward to support managed growth. To assist developers to understand the Council's design expectations, in June 2016, Planning Committee Council adopted the Swindon Residential Design Guide, Complementing the Design Guide (Planning Committee minute 124, 2016/17 refers). In July 2016, I spoke at the launch of the Swindon Design Review Panel, which will be an important tool in fostering collaboration between the Council and developers on achieving good design. The Design Review Panel will be imbedded in an enhanced pre-application advice service, which will be launched in the Autumn. I have asked that the Design Review Panel involves seeking out Councillors views within their workstream.
- 3.12 Over several years the Council has prided itself on its ability to determine planning applications in a timely manner. However, as planning application numbers continue to rise our performance against target decision-making time frames has slipped. The Council is currently employing two agency planning officers to help manage workloads. I am also tackling bottlenecks that have

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arisen in key service areas that support the Planning function. The Council is embarking on a project to ensure that our planning systems are “digital first”. These actions will reduce planning application delays, though it should be noted that the Council remains in the top 50% of Local Planning Authorities for timely decision making.

New Eastern Villages

- 3.13 For the last 50 years Swindon has been a fast growing town and our growth has traditionally been delivered through large, strategic urban extensions. The current Local Plan requires further growth at Wichelstowe, Tadpole Farm, Commonhead, Kingsdown and the New Eastern Villages (NEV). The NEV is the largest planned greenfield urban extension in the UK. I have supported a new officer team dedicated to the NEV, and chair both a Cabinet Member Advisory Group and a Developer Forum. It is important that we are adequately resourced to support delivery of the NEV, given the scale and complexities of the site and the infrastructure required to mitigate the impact of development, and I work with officers to ensure that development coming forward on these sites is of the highest quality and will meet the needs of the existing and new communities. I have actively supported officers in refusing a strategic development proposal at the NEV which delivered neither certainty nor quality.
- 3.14 The Council continues to work closely with delivery partners, including statutory agencies to accelerate delivery at the NEV, and I have supported officers in the preparation of the NEV Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document which supports the Local Plan in securing and implementing necessary infrastructure in the right place, at the right time and by the most appropriate method.
- 3.15 The Department for Transport (DfT) and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have made a provisional allocation of £48.5m to support transport interventions at the NEV. This will allow enabling infrastructure to be delivered in line with new homes and jobs, and the first scheme to have funding confirmed, Greenbridge Roundabout, is on programme for completion in early 2017. Officers are currently working on a detailed business case for White Hart Junction and Southern Connector Road, and I continue to engage key partners, including Highways England and local businesses, to ensure disruption on the road network is minimised during delivery of the NEV. Officers attend a regular Joint Working Party meeting with Oxfordshire County Council and Vale of White Horse District Council to ensure the full impacts of development on the A420 corridor are understood and planned for, and also regularly meet with Oxfordshire LEP. Further, I progressed a Cabinet Report relating to the use of

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Compulsory Purchase Orders for the NEV to support timely delivery of infrastructure if necessary.

- 3.16 I have written to Robert Buckland QC MP & the Minister for Roads, Andrew Jones MP, to ask for a meeting regarding our future infrastructure investment in bringing homes & jobs forward. This is to ensure that Swindon is in the front of the mind of Government when decisions are being made and that we can deliver the vital infrastructure as early on in development as possible.

Building Control and Land Charges

- 3.17 The market share of the Building Control Service is currently around 40% (against a target of 50%). Whilst below target, the Service has managed to secure the majority of major commercial and regeneration schemes coming forward in the Borough, with market share on domestic work lagging behind.
- 3.18 Customer feedback on the service is excellent. Clients appreciate the ability of the Building Control Service to de-risk and value engineer major development schemes. For the second year running the Service has been a multi-award winner at the prestigious LABC Building Excellence Awards event.

What would you do differently?

- 3.19 The adoption of the Local Plan was a significant milestone for the Council. An adopted Local Plan is important to provide certainty to residents and investors, and is essential if the Council is to successfully bid for a range of incentives related to the planning process. Robust though the Local Plan is, low build rates in the market, which were not envisaged by the Council, or the independent Inspector when it was prepared, have recently called our housing land supply into question. Whilst the Borough Council can encourage build rates to some extent, I will look to a wider range of sites in the Local Plan review to ensure that we are not at the mercy of aggressive planning applications that are not wanted by the community.
- 3.20 I will also look to exploit the powers that are being made available through the Housing and Planning Act to facilitate housing delivery on suitable sites. I want Swindon's supply of housing land to be of a wider scale and mix to foster housing choice. I want to ensure that we have sites available to deliver starter homes, custom build housing, affordable homes, executive homes and specialist needs housing.

What are the Challenges facing your portfolio?

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- 3.21 There are a number of challenges facing several aspects of the portfolio, though the following are of particular relevance.
- 3.21.1 To continue to work with Wiltshire Council and other neighbouring Local Authorities and the LEP on a joint evidence base towards reviewing the Local Plan in a timely manner, that is supported by all parties and does not put the timetable for review at risk.
 - 3.21.2 The need to ensure that the New Eastern Villages are delivered in a comprehensive, timely and sustainable manner against a context of a wide and disparate range of development and landowning interests.
 - 3.21.3 The need to work pro-actively to plug the perceived 5 year housing supply shortfall, including co-operating with developers and delivery agencies to help release stalled sites; developing sustainable small scale housing schemes on underused publicly owned land in consultation with Ward Councillors and the local community; and prioritising solutions to enable Wichelstowe to move quickly to deliver completions.
 - 3.21.4 Maintaining performance and ensuring that value is added to planning applications focussing on the most strategically important schemes, within the context of restricted resources.
 - 3.21.5 Continuing to support Parishes and local communities in the production of Neighbourhood Plans, and
 - 3.21.6 Resourcing new legislative powers to grant 'permission in principle' which will provide the Council with opportunities to better shape Swindon's development and to secure financial benefits from growth.

Performance towards the Pledges

- 3.22 **Deliver the Government standard Superfast Broadband coverage to all commercial and domestic premises in the Borough by 2017.**
- 3.22.1 Over 7,000 homes across the Borough who currently have previously suffered very poor broadband speeds are now able to access the Superfast Swindon service and our roll out will continues across the Borough in the coming months.
 - 3.22.2 I am particularly pleased to see we have recently launched the service in Bishopstone and Wroughton and we have received very positive reports about the performance of the network to date.

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3.22.3 As a consequence of the Council's leadership on this issue, and campaigns by Haydon Wick, Priory Vale, and St Andrews ward councillors, including myself, two fibre broadband providers are now extending and enhancing their networks in North Swindon, so that 6.500 households will have a wider choice of commercial options.

3.23 Construct solar arrays on Council-owned land at Common Farm, Chapel Farm and a solar noise barrier along roads including the M4 at Wichelstowe.

3.23.1 A 5MW solar scheme at Common Farm was energised on 29th June 2016. The project was funded through the UK's first local authority backed "solar bond", and included investment from the local community and Swindon Borough Council. The scheme offered a 6% return for local residents and an ongoing annual community payment for local projects. Construction of a 3MW commercial scheme at Common Farm is due to begin later in 2016.

3.23.2 Chapel Farm is a landfill site in Swindon and a 5MW scheme is planned for the oldest part of the site, which was capped in the 1990s. The project has secured a grid connection and planning permission and the tender process for a builder is about to close. The scheme is due for completion by March 2017.

3.23.3 Progress on the solar noise barriers has been challenging given the technical nature of the projects, land ownership issues and, on the M4 project, alignment with the Wichelstowe development timescales. However, the opportunity remains to progress these schemes if these challenges can be overcome and a suitable electricity "offtaker" secured.

3.24 Develop Council-owned brownfield sites at Oakfield, and other sites as they become available for housing. Progress is being made in developing a scheme at Oakfield which will meet a range of housing needs, which is intended to be an exemplar in cross sector delivery. Work is in train to identify underused public sector land which the Council may wish to develop itself for market or private rented housing. It is anticipated that this project could deliver up to 1,000 homes through windfall development throughout the life of the Local Plan.

3.25 With Barratt Homes we will build up to 3,500 homes in Wichelstowe including the development of a district centre.

3.25.1 The status of the Wichelstowe development is covered in item 14 of the Cabinet report that was considered elsewhere on the agenda.

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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 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.

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 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 and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

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

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7. Background Papers

7.1 None.

8. Appendices

8.1 None.