

Council

Monday 27 February 2023

Agenda Item 8 (a), Written Questions

Question From: Councillor John Broad

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Pan Regional Partnership (PRP)

Question

“Dear Cllr Barry Wood,

The introduction of the Pan Regional Partnership (PRP) at the last Executive meeting came as a shock to many councillors.

As this is a renewed version of the previous Growth Arc and its subsequent iterations that have all been rejected, can the leader explain to members how this otherwise already dismissed type of project has so quickly been produced and approved without any scrutiny or approval from this full council?”

Question From: Councillor Ian Middleton

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: 5 Year Housing Land Supply

Question

“At a recent meeting of the Executive, a policy decision was taken to change the way this council calculates its 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS). This increased our 5YHLS from 3.5 years to 5.4 years, seemingly at the stroke of a pen.

Whilst this may be good news for many regions of the district that are being eyed by developers keen to take advantage of our reduced 5YHLS, it raises questions about why the council has been working on incorrect figures for so long. The report concludes that the Strategic Housing Market Assessment or SHMA is unreliable, yet this has been what many important housing policy decisions have been based on and was intended to inform such decisions until 2031.

The SHMA was also the basis for housing need assumptions that led to the Local Plan Partial Review (LPPR) and generated a working assumption of Oxford’s housing need across Oxfordshire. This included an artificial uplift that pushed

Cherwell's housing need figure way beyond that of any other authority in the country.

This was challenged extensively during both the LPPR and the City Council local plan examinations by campaigners and expert planning consultants who argued that we should be using the standard method to calculate housing need rather than the inflated figures being relied on by CDC and the City Council. This in turn led to the 'working assumption' of Oxford's unmet need and resulted in a huge amount of land being taken out of the greenbelt and handed over to developers. The argument then was that this would prevent speculative development, yet we now see that the council's over-estimate of housing need and projected growth pushed the 5YHLS beyond achievable limits and still left the district open to speculation. In other words the communities in my area and others have sacrificed their green spaces for nothing.

The SHMA is now just over half way through the period it was intended to cover and the LPPR was only adopted three years ago, yet we now have a final admission that it's an unreliable assessment of true housing need.

Why has it taken so long for the council to accept they got their figures wrong, and will the leader now finally admit that those of us who raised questions about the council's housing need assessments were right all along?"