

Council

Monday 18 December 2023

Written Questions

Question From: Councillor Ian Middleton

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Draft Local Plan 2040 – affordable housing

Question

“At the last full Council meeting I asked the Leader why our proposals on the draft Local Plan 2040 appeared to undermine the motion passed unanimously by this council in February 2023 to investigate an increase in our housing development mix policy to a requirement for 50% affordable housing.

I referenced the report on the plan which said that a range of affordability ratios had been tested on viability grounds but that only 30% affordable housing was being recommended in line with our current policy. I said I believed that could have influenced responses to the Regulation 18 consultation.

The response I received from the Leader was “it’s complicated”.

I acknowledged that response and that I had not given the Leader advanced notice of my question. I asked for the background details of how various levels of affordability had been tested and what information the Executive had considered in terms of changing our affordable housing policy as agreed in my motion. Essentially I hoped to see the information on which this recommendation was based.

The Leader agreed to provide that detail but I have so far received no further information from him or officers.

So I will ask again – Can I be provided with an explanation of why the draft local plan which forms part of the public consultation includes a recommendation that we should continue to support a policy calling for only 30% affordable housing, with no context on how that figure was arrived at and no apparent opportunity to suggest a different figure in the consultation, when we have passed a resolution committing the council to fairly considering an increase to 50%?

Question From: Councillor Ian Middleton

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Topic: Long term empty homes

Question

“The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has identified 425 homes in Cherwell as long-term empty as of October this year. This represents a slight decrease from 429 during the same period in 2022 but a significant increase in the order of 13% against the position in 2018 when a similar story hit the headlines.

Rebecca Moore, director of Action on Empty Homes, has said: “It beggars belief that while children are growing up sharing beds in temporary accommodation, our nation has over a quarter of a million homes sitting empty. To say this is a national disgrace is a profound understatement.”

Would the Leader agree with me that, while our housing officers struggle every day to find accommodation for homeless families in the district, the fact that the number of long term empty homes in Cherwell has continued to rise over the past 5 years is a disgrace?”