

Council – 10 February 2017

Public Questions (4)

1.	Question from Adrian Kingsbury to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan (questioner will be present)
	The agenda identifies the potential loss of the New Homes Bonus as a Key Risk should the JCS not be approved. Can Cheltenham Borough Council confirm whether they are more concerned about the loss of the New Homes Bonus than the destruction of the Greenbelt through inappropriate development?
	Response from the Leader
	<p>For as long as I have any role in this Council's decisions on the JCS they will be based on trying to meet the housing need for our town in the most appropriate way and not on implications of the New Homes Bonus.</p> <p>Through the JCS examination, the Green Belt within Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough has been considered and assessed in detail by an independent inspector. The principal of this assessment has been to examine whether, taking into account the need for housing and employment, the respective contributions of different parts of the greenbelt and other factors, there are exceptional circumstances which justify changes to the designation. The JCS examiner, looking at all the facts has concluded that overall, such exceptional circumstances do exist. The government's suggested reductions in New Homes Bonus for those authorities not progressing in plan making would be a risk for any planning authority, and require that plan making (whatever the outcome) is conducted quickly and efficiently.</p>
2.	Question from Adrian Kingsbury to the Leader
	JCS-PMM052 - Can the Council define what is the "very special circumstances test" that will determine whether development outweighs the harm to the Greenbelt by the virtue of the development being inappropriate?
	Response from the Leader
	<p>National Planning Policy says that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. What will amount to very special circumstances depends on the facts of each case. For the test to be met, the harm to the Green Belt would have to be outweighed by major benefits to society, the economy or the environment. Housing need alone will not normally amount to exceptional circumstances. The test has been the subject of a number of complex legal judgements.</p> <p>The fundamental principle remains that decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan, (in this case the JCS) which has been through detailed consideration. Therefore using this plan led approach we seek to conserve the Green Belt going forward whilst planning to meet our need, ensuring that piecemeal and opportunistic development in the Green Belt can be prevented.</p>

3.	Question from Jean Gladwell to the Leader
	<p>Why when previous councillors have gone to such lengths to keep this land out of JCS is this council using such indecent haste to push it through and concrete over it with high density housing and a science park. Anything done in haste is often repented at leisure. To use such a prime piece of land to tick numbers boxes when Government housing policy is changing is at best reckless.</p> <p>When the motorway link is eventually sorted out this piece of land becomes central to the main road infrastructure to be planned. Allowing traffic on PE Way to be reduced and opening up land on both sides of the town. We have a beautiful Regency town don't you think visitors and new businesses deserve to see a well thought out plan? Not high density badly thought out housing estates like Arle farm side by side with a modern science park and dumped among existing housing stock at the cost of beautiful countryside. This last bit of green space this side of town is too important to rush through.</p>
	Response from the Leader
	<p>No decisions will be rushed through.</p> <p>During the examination detailed evidence was heard over a number of sessions on both the Green Belt sensitivity of the site and the potential for development which would meet both economic and housing needs at West Cheltenham. The agendas for these sessions, and the documents produced in relation to them are available on the JCS examination webpage, particularly JCS Green Belt papers EXAM 142 and EXAM 196. The Main Modifications consultation, which should commence shortly, will allow detailed representations on West Cheltenham to be made, which will be passed in full to the inspector. There will then be further hearing sessions (likely to be in early summer) where representations on West Cheltenham can also be made. Ultimately these are matters for the examination and for the inspector's consideration – having heard from all the parties.</p>
4.	Question from Carol Kingsbury to the Leader (will be present)
	<p>The Government Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell, in an interview on Sunday indicated that the long awaited housing white paper, which is to be published on Tuesday, would represent a "change of tone" from past Conservative housing policy, reflecting the fact that rising costs mean many people can no longer afford to get on the housing ladder.</p> <p>I believe the policy document is to include measures to encourage local authorities to plan "proactively" for more "build to rent" developments which would ensure more secure long-term family friendly tenancies are more widely available hopefully ensuring renting itself does not become unaffordable.</p> <p>How do you propose to incorporate this new strategy into you JCS plan and what percentage of currently proposed development can you guarantee will meet this new requirement?</p>
	Response from the Leader
	<p>The Housing White Paper was released on the 7th of February this year. It sets out the government's plans to boost the supply of new homes in England. A major part of the</p>

white paper is a focus on ensuring that councils have up to date development plans for their area, and that they cooperate with one another strongly in their production. The JCS already incorporates a large part of the fundamentals in the White Paper, as the proposals (which are subject to consultation) are an amalgamation and strengthening of previous ministerial statements in this area.

As regards development of 'build to rent' developments, the JCS is a strategic level development document, and the allocations within it are flexible enough to encompass changes to the type and mix of housing tenures which may come forward as part of changes to government policy. It has always been the case that strategic allocations would normally contain a degree of rental property, which, if these policy suggestions are brought forward could involve a formal 'build to rent' element.

Similarly, through the Cheltenham Plan, build to rent schemes could be brought forward as part of local allocations. The government have described affordable private rented homes as a potential alternative to other affordable housing products, but have not given a view on how much affordable provision should be provided by this tenure. This would be a matter for each local authority based on the characteristics of the local housing market area. The Gloucestershire authorities will look into this as part of an ongoing review of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.