

## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 28 January 2021**

### **Question 1**

**Ms G Bradbury, Garway Hill**

**To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills**

In 2016 Phase 1 of the Fastershire fibre roll out to Garway Hill terminated short leaving approximately 12 properties unconnected. These homeowners have been waiting since then, struggling with speeds of under 2 MBPS making it difficult to work from home or stream any media. We now hear Gigaclear have been awarded the contract but will not start work till Q3 2021 at the earliest. Why have Gigaclear been awarded the contract to build duplicate and parallel infrastructure up from the Forest of Dean, further delaying our connection to a fibre network and why are you not contracting BT Openreach (or any other provider) to extend their existing fibre network already on the hill, and already paid for, to connect the remaining houses. Surely this would be cheaper?

### **Response**

Thank you for the question. The delivery of subsidised broadband infrastructure is a complex area and one where technical, legal, commercial and procurement considerations often combine to make what appear to be pragmatic solutions in one specific area look counter intuitive.

The original BT contract delivered a number of properties in your area but not all. Its coverage was heavily influenced by the existing infrastructure footprint meaning that in some instances one neighbour became connected while the other was not. More often than not this would have been a consequence of 2 separate elements of the Openreach network serving each property. Extending that network some times by a few meters would have involved a total upgrade of that secondary element of infrastructure and Openreach in this instance would have determined that this could not be done given the available public subsidy.

Gigaclear were contracted to reach more of the areas that BT couldn't the first time round. This resulted from an open procurement exercise and they were the best value tender.

The overbuild occurs because Gigaclear and Openreach are two entirely separate networks therefore to get to the hardest to reach extremities that Openreach have not reached, the new network has to go past some of the same areas to reach out further. Those that benefit twice as it were are not funded by the council but it does make the premises we do fund cheaper as it improves the financial viability of the contract for the provider (and therefore reduces the cost to Fastershire) by creating a larger market for them to sell their Full Fibre services to. As a result they're more prepared to invest more of their own funding.

The fact that they are unrelated to BT means they are not bound by the Openreach architecture hence they can reach to premises like yours. It's important also to note that due to state aid regulations and therefore by law, we could not mandate in any public procurement the use of a pre-existing infrastructure.

### **Question 2**

**Mr T Pincham, Hereford**

**To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills**

Can the Cabinet Member explicitly and specifically set out, as a result of splitting the Development Partnership activities - and diverting additional funds from this to affordable housing

- what the implications of this are for investment during 2021/22 with regard to Development of Transport Hub at Station Approach and Hereford FC development and ancillary student accommodation on Blackfriars Street.

## **Response**

The Development and Regeneration Partnership (DRP) was procured in 2017 to support the council in delivering both housing and regeneration projects from the outset. In the paper that is due to be considered at the cabinet meeting on the 28th January, it is recommended that £20m of the existing overarching DRP budget (£40.6m) is allocated specifically for affordable housing. As it was always the intention the DRP budget supported affordable housing there is no overall change to the funding allocated, with the remaining DRP funds available to support other regeneration or housing projects, such as the possible development of the Blackfriars St end of the Hereford Football Club, subject to further detailed proposals and cabinet decisions.

The development of the Transport Hub at Station Approach is part of the Hereford City Centre Transport Package and is not being brought forward as part of the DRP programme.

## **Question 3**

**Ms M Albright, Hereford**

**To: cabinet member, housing, regulatory services and community safety**

Much of the Affordable/Council housing appears to be focused upon Hereford and the market towns and on large developments.

Would the council be open to exploring a range of other Affordable Housing provisions - specifically Affordable Self/Custom Build?

This type of Affordable Housing is particularly well suited to smaller, rural communities and is not catered for through any conventional social housing streams currently. It is a policy that works well in Shropshire and has the potential to provide a wide range of sustainable and architecturally interesting rural dwellings that are needs led and protected as Affordable in perpetuity. It also privately funded so has no impact upon council or RP funding.

Self-building my own home as a young Herefordian 20 years ago was a life changing opportunity - one which I passionately believe can have a positive impact upon rural communities and individuals across Herefordshire.

## **Response**

Much of the affordable housing being delivered at present is mainly focussed on market towns and larger developments, this is because the council currently do not have a 5 year housing land supply and an unprecedented amount of developments have come forward in the aforementioned locations. There will always be a bigger demand for affordable housing in the market towns as opposed to rural locations, however, developments are still taking place in rural areas. The delivery of affordable housing is always needs led and where gaps in delivery are identified our preferred partners are encouraged to meet those needs through new delivery. A key priority for the Council is the delivery of affordable housing of all types and tenures to meet the County's identified housing need.

The council are extremely flexible with tenures and build types and always looking for opportunities to try new initiatives. The feasibility study to explore Council owned sites offers potential developments to start building, the Council is keen to engage with third parties to explore all house building opportunities that can be qualified through Community Led Housing, self-build

and custom build developments. The Council will endeavour to engage with communities as sites are identified, designed and developed.

A new Supplementary Planning Document, Affordable Housing has recently been out for consultation and is due for publication in March. I believe you provided comments on this document. You will recall a section has specifically been incorporated in to the document on Custom and Self build, the extract is below.

### Self and Custom Build

3.0 Self-build and custom-build housing: is defined in the NPPF as “Housing built by an individual, a group of individuals, or persons working with or for them, to be occupied by that individual. Such housing can be either market or affordable housing. A legal definition, for the purpose of applying the Self- build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended), is contained in section 1(A1) and (A2) of that Act.”

3.1 “Self and custom build housing is an important element of the Government’s housing strategy because it can contribute towards housing delivery and economic growth. The Government therefore wants to see an increase in the number of available plots for self and custom building. The Core Strategy was close to adoption when the Self and Custom Build Housing Act was passed. Therefore it does not include any policies on this matter although there are textual references to it. It intends to address this matter in the update of the Core Strategy. Nevertheless the council recognises that self-build housing provides individuals and groups the opportunity to gain lower cost home ownership with it being subsidised. However there is potential for formal affordable self-build housing to be delivered as community self-build schemes. These involve groups of local people in housing need, building homes for themselves usually as part of a Community Land Trust or Community Led Housing Group. In these cases the assets remain in the ownership of the local community group as affordable homes.

3.2 The council encourages the inclusion of a suitable number of self or custom build plots that will contribute to affordable housing supply within housing developments or as stand-alone applications in line with policies in the Core Strategy. These may be delivered in partnership with the council, registered housing providers or a community land trust. In all cases the Council will need to be satisfied that there is demand for this and that any proposals for affordable self and custom build housing meets this definition before it grants outline or full permission. The scheme proposal should meet the requirements of this SPD. Any planning permission will then be subject to conditions and/or obligations to ensure it meets this definition and that the plots are made available to those that are eligible for affordable housing. All affordable self and custom self-build plots granted on a rural exception site under Core Strategy Policy H2 “Rural exception site” will be secured as affordable housing in perpetuity in the same way as other types of affordable housing.

3.3 Where affordable self/custom build housing is proposed, the affordable housing model should be submitted to and approved by the LPA prior to the submission of a planning application and it should be detailed in the Affordable Housing Statement accompanying the planning application.

3.4 The Council maintains a register of those seeking to self or custom build. A profile of those registered can be viewed as part of the Authority Monitoring Reports<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the self-build register, the first affordable self-build scheme has recently completed in Leominster. The development was a collaboration between Stonewater Housing Association and the Council providing self-build accommodation for veterans. This opportunity gave a number of homeless veterans a focus, enabled new skills, to some employment and ultimately provided an affordable home for them at the end of the build. The development has been a huge success and further developments will be encouraged to replicate this model.