

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the Council

| Question Number | Questioner | Question | Question to |
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| MQ 1 | Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty | <p>IAT21424 returned a reply last October that a section 278 still hadn't been entered into for Porthouse Rise, Bromyard. Planning legal officers subsequently confirmed that they had not been instructed on the matter. Planning approval was nearly seven years ago. An enhancement to the roadside pavement is shown in approved drawing EII-146-KM-B-183 and refers to detail 617-03F of a zebra crossing.</p> <p>The planning officer confirmed verbally in November that he was hoping to deliver the scheme in negotiation with the developer, Keepmoat. Despite asking since I have heard nothing more, and the developer has long left the site. Bromyard residents are reasonably asking me where their improvements are.</p> <p>When will the Council's planning department confirm the timetable for the delivery of these vital infrastructure improvements which should have gone hand in hand with the delivery of the development?</p> | Cabinet member infrastructure and transport |
| <p>Response:</p> <p>The applicant submitted a revised planning proposal for the delivery of cycle and pedestrian improvements to serve the development at the Porthouse site (application reference 190732). The submitted plans include the provision of a zebra crossing on the B4214. A report recommending approval of the revised scheme has been drafted and will be issued by 12 March. This will require by condition the delivery of the improvements within 12 months of the date of the decision.</p> | | | |
| <p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>Will assurance be provided that a review of planning and planning enforcement resourcing will now be undertaken to ensure that statutory services can be delivered and recommendations arising from the peer review report can be implemented and public confidence restored? Further funding for the planning resource was supported.</p> | | | |
| <p>Cabinet Member Response:</p> <p>Robust conditions in applications was important to ensure that developer obligations were clear and could be enforced. Ensuring robust conditions would be addressed in future to ensure obligations to the local community are fulfilled. Additional funding was required to increase the capacity of the service but this would need to be taken from another area of the council if external support was not forthcoming. A written response would be provided.</p> | | | |

Written response provided on 8 April 2021:

At the end of 2020, we commissioned the Local government Association's Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to undertake an independent review of the council's planning service and in early 2021 we received their recommendations. We are currently working through this and have already briefed the teams. However, and like the rest of the council, the planning service has to play its part in helping to find the savings required to ensure that budgets are balanced. That said, I have made it very clear to senior management that enforcement is vital to maintain resident's confidence in local democracy and to ensure everyone plays by the same rules. I am striving to ensure that the planning directorate savings we have to make will be done in a way that does not negatively impact on enforcement and makes enforcement more efficient and effective. My view is enforcement is somewhere we will need to put extra focus on and we will probably need to consider undertaking more enforcement action over the next few years, not less.

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| MQ 2 | Councillor Christy Bolderson, Wormside | I understand that there is currently an employment freeze within the planning department and vacant posts for enforcement officer positions. I have a number of long outstanding enforcement issues within my ward and given the number of recommendations raised within the Planning Peer Review (PAS report), how does the administration plan to ensure there is sufficient resources to address these issues? | Cabinet member infrastructure and transport |
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Response:

The Planning Service and its enforcement team have been resourced as far as the council's budgetary position currently allows although, like many other council services, we are having to review the level of service in order for the council to balance its budget for the coming financial year. Posts have not therefore been deleted. Please also be assured that the recommendations made by the PAS report have been taken on board and that the planning service will be adopting as many of these as possible in order to improve our efficiency, although we will still need to ensure that the service remains within budget.

Supplementary Question:

Planning officer caseloads were concerning and had been identified as an issue in the PAS review. There was currently a large backlog of planning applications to be processed. The employment freeze was having an adverse impact on planning services and enforcement in the Wormside ward. If the income from the service exceeded its full cost base why were vacant posts not being filled?

Cabinet Member Response:

There was an essential need for a planning service to be well funded and robust. A distinction was drawn between the planning process which was statutory and enforcement which was discretionary. There was a current delay to the filling of vacant posts due to a restructure which was in progress to determine how the service could be more efficient in future and where savings could be realised. A similar backlog of applications existed at local authorities across the country which was the result of a consistent reduction in funding for local government since 2010.

Section 151 officer response – A written response would be provided on the financial position of the planning service but it was confirmed that it was not cash-positive.