

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
– 21 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**Question 1**

**From: N Winters, Llangrove**

I would like to ask the Scrutiny Committee why Herefordshire does not have a policy on promoting and preserving our Dark Skies.

Dark Skies attracts visitors and investment from tourism. This is a resource worth protecting and requires only the investment by the Council of forming a policy on preserving, promoting and ensuring new developments do not destroy this delicate feature of our landscape.

Dark Skies are also good for the ecology of the area, bats and many other species are affected by light pollution.

In a time of Climate Change and the Energy Crisis we should be encouraging everyone to reduce or stop using unnecessary lighting. A policy of not allowing the permanent illumination of building, not allowing 'Up-Lighting', the requirement that external lighting should be controlled would all help to preserve our Dark Skies.

**Response**

The existing Core Strategy adopted in 2015 does not include a specific dark skies policy and it was not an issue raised or considered during the preparation of the Plan. However, the issue has been recognised as something that could be included within the updated Herefordshire Local Plan and a specific question was included within the Council's Policy Options consultation in the Spring and a good level of support given to the inclusion of such a policy.

There are a significant number of Neighbourhood Development Plans which contain a dark skies policy and these plans form part of the current statutory development plan which is used to determine planning applications.

**Question 2**

**From: A Harvey, Kings Cople**

In view of the failure of Herefordshire Council to establish robust policies on housing mix, and its failure adequately to monitor housing mix on completions since 2015, especially those in rural developments, how was the Housing Market Needs Assessment of 2021 commissioned? Please include information about the extent to which it conforms, or otherwise, to National Planning Policy Guidance, and comment on the apparent lack of transparency regarding its adoption and the timing of its activation, the latter of which appears to alter the effect of some NDPs incorporated into the Local Plan for 2011-31 (adopted in 2015); also, on the impact it appears to have upon some options set out in the Place Shaping Options Consultation – Rural Areas (June 2022).

**Response**

Policy H3 of the adopted Core Strategy covers the issue of the range and mix of housing. All policies were subject to consultation and subject of an independent Examination in Public (EIP). No recommendation was made by the Inspector to indicate that alternative or additional policies were required.

Monitoring of the Core Strategy policies is undertaken on an annual basis and focusses on the implementation of the adopted local plan policies and their targets. Policy H3 is monitored and

reported on as part of this process in Section 2 of the Authority Monitoring Report, and is published on the Council's website at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/23217/amr-2021-section-2-core-strategy-monitoring-policy>. However, there are no specific local plan target set out in the Core Strategy policies for housing mix in rural areas, and so it has been decided not to use Council's resources to monitor this aspect of housing development.

The Housing Market Area Needs Assessment was procured as part of a competitive process in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules

The report is considered to have been prepared in accordance with national guidance and good practice including:

- National advice on housing and economic needs assessments Housing and economic needs assessment - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>)
- Housing Needs of different groups Housing needs of different groups - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-needs-of-different-groups>)
- Guidance for older and disabled people Housing for older and disabled people - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-for-older-and-disabled-people>); and
- Self and custom built housing Self-build and custom housebuilding - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/self-build-and-custom-housebuilding>).

Section 3 sets out in full the policy context for report.

The report provides the most up-to-date evidence in respect of housing needs and requirements in Herefordshire and its use as part of the preparation of the update to the Local Plan is entirely consistent with National Planning policy and advice.

### **Supplementary Question:**

In the light of your response to my earlier question to the above meeting, can you please provide precise details of:

- 1) The process by which this report was adopted

### **Response**

The report is an evidence base document and these are not formally adopted. It is only planning policy that is adopted. The finalised HMANA was placed on the Council's website in July 2021.

- 2) What written records were made of this process

### **Response**

The HMANA was presented to the members of cabinet as part of regular briefing meetings and not at formal Cabinet meetings; they took the format of a presentation by the consultants with the opportunity for questions thereafter. The Council does not publish papers or minutes of these private cabinet briefings and discussions. The first presentation on their evidence took place on 1st February 2021 and the second presentation was on 1st April 2021.

- 3) Confirm whether these are publicly available

### **Response**

As indicated above, the HMANA is not formally adopted and presentations were to briefings not meetings that have published papers or minutes.

- 4) Why are the recommendations contained in it already being applied to applications made in respect of sites allocated in NDPs incorporated in the current local plan (predicated on the 2013 Hearn HMA), without the relevant parish councils being consulted about, or informed of them prior to their adoption?

**Response**

Policy H3 of the Core Strategy indicates that ‘the latest Local Housing Market Assessment will provide evidence of the need for the appropriate mix and range of housing types and sizes’. Many Neighbourhood Plans have a similar policy – The Kings Cople NDP Policy H3 for example states ‘..fig 8.11 and 8.12 of the Herefordshire Local Housing Market Assessment 2014 or such other document which updates the local needs assessment’. Therefore, using evidence updates to the HMANA are already written into current planning policy.