

Agenda Item 6 – To answer written questions or receive petitions submitted by the public.

Question submitted by David Matthews

As the council is proposing to appoint an “expert “organisation “to rewrite a new local plan” I would like to know details of the tender document that has presumably been issued to interested parties, plus whether the “contract” will include a clause(s) based on payment by results?

Answer: As the council is proposing to appoint an “expert “organisation “to rewrite a new local plan” I would like to know details of the tender document that has presumably been issued to interested parties, plus whether the “contract” will include a clause(s) based on payment by results?

Question submitted by Erica Livermore

What percentage probability do officers of the council ascribe to the chance the Local Plan will be complete by end May 2025?

Answer: A probability has not been calculated. It is a challenging timescale but the Council agreed on Monday 18th December a Local Development Schedule (LDS) which is the current timeline for completing the new Local Plan which concludes in May 2025.

Question submitted by Michael Rodber

Bearing in mind that there is no legal obligation for HDC to agree to take Leicester’s houses (according to the Councillor in charge, Simon Galton, “It is absolutely true that the council legally doesn’t have to sign this document”),

Can those councillors supporting this initiative make a clear statement as to what are the benefits to the residents and voters of HDC of having all this extra housing?

Answer: Please see the Summary of Reasons for the Recommendation for the report relating to the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground

https://www.harborough.gov.uk/news/article/1669/media_briefing_leicester_and_leicestershire_statement_of_common_ground_socg

Signing this statement is not a legal requirement. Meeting the Duty to Cooperate is a component of which is providing evidence of ongoing constructive engagement. Paras 34-40 of the report explain the implications for housing numbers.

Question submitted by Professor Symonds

Why are the council officials and elected members supporting taking Leicester's housing overspill into Market Harborough when this will increase congestion and pressure on already overstretched public services in Market Harborough especially as Leicester has many brown field sites that need re-development?

Answer: The distribution of housing growth within Harborough District will be determined through preparation of the new local plan. This will include consideration of the impact of new development on existing infrastructure and the need for any additional infrastructure required to meet the needs of new development.

Question submitted by Mike Fowler

Shouldn't the council wait for the new National Planning Policy Framework before taking the decision on the Statement of Common Ground?

Answer: Council will consider this further when it is published and ensure all the relevant evidence and information is taken into account. At the Council meeting on Monday 18th December additional safeguards were put in the recommendations to give the Council flexibility if it is in the best interest of Harborough District.

Question submitted by David Campbell-Kelly

As a Council you run the risk of rushing a Local Plan preparation, to achieve a Duty to Co-operate that does not apply, wasting millions of pounds, and ending up with a Plan which is then NOT found to be “sound” and rejected by the Planning Inspectorate. Are you concerned that, as YOUR Barrister identified, YOU too “will (have) reputational damage and wasted resources”?

Answer: The Council have legal advice that says the statutory Duty to Cooperate is still in legal force. Therefore, the Council needs to recognise the need to meet that legal duty when preparing its new local plan. In order that the reprofiled local plan preparation timetable is met, and that a plan is submitted for public examination by the government deadline of 30th June 2025, additional resources are required. The process of preparing the plan will provide the best possible chance of the new plan being found sound by an independent government inspector. The most effective way to ensure the district is protected from unwanted, unplanned speculative development is to prepare a new local plan for submission within the reprofiled plan preparation timetable set out.

Question submitted by Sarah Sattin

Why should Harborough be forced to accept more housing when Leicester has failed to build their quota?

The villages, particularly Tilton and Halstead infrastructure already doesn't cope with existing residents with regular electricity power cuts, low water pressure and flooding. There aren't any GP services/ pharmacists or schools within the village and no regular bus route. Forcing our villages to build more houses and hold more residents will have a negative impact on those of us residing here.

Answer: It is national government planning policy that housing needs should be met from wherever it arises. It is also national government planning policy that the housing need requirement of Leicester City is uplifted by 35%. This means that despite the city council doing all they can to accommodate their need in their administrative area, it is the case that they cannot accommodate it all. In such circumstances neighbouring authorities are obliged to take some of that unmet need and deliver what is apportioned to them in their administrative area. So, the district is not being forced to take more housing, rather it is government policy that means the district has to take a proportion of unmet housing need arising from the city. Infrastructure provision will be considered as part of the preparation of the new local plan, including that mentioned. The new local plan will be accompanied by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan which will be a programme of the new infrastructure required to secure the delivery of the new local plan.

Additional resources are required to meet the reprofiled local plan preparation timetable in order to ensure a local plan is in place to meet national government deadlines in June 2025 when a new local plan needs to be submitted for examination by a government inspector. It is considered that this is the best way to protect the District from unwanted speculative development.

Question submitted by Victoria Tattershall

Please can the Council explain why it is necessary to spend a proposed £2 million pounds on planning consultants and not services for their district?

Answer: Additional resources are required to meet the reprofiled local plan preparation timetable in order to ensure a local plan is in place to meet national government deadlines in June 2025 when a new local plan needs to be submitted for examination by a government inspector. This is an important service for the district as the commencement of preparation of a new local plan will ensure that both the current adopted local plan and the preparation of a new plan to protect the district from speculative development in future will both be achieved in the shortest possible timescale.

Questions submitted by David Hill

In a leaflet that many residents have received it states that Harborough District Council has been instructed by the Government to take thousands more homes; can you publish a copy of this government instruction?

Answer: Government policy states that 20 cities across the country have their housing requirement uplifted by 35%. Government policy also states that when one of those cities cannot meet those needs within their own administrative boundary, neighbouring districts will contribute to meeting any arising unmet need in their administrative areas. This government policy is already published.

Question submitted by Seb Kendall

With the recent dismissal of the importance of a review of a neighbourhood plan by both the planning officers and some councillors, what justification is there in parishes having any confidence that they have any credibility in a local plan?"

Answer: The preparation of the new local plan is unconnected with the preparation of any other plan. Neighbourhood plan preparation is the responsibility of the neighbourhood area that the plan serves. The preparation of the new local plan is the responsibility of the district council. However, it is felt that a future workshop for neighbourhood plan chairs would be advantageous early 2024. The Council will be looking to set this up to ensure all neighbourhood plan areas can ask questions, and collectively and collaboratively plan for any future revisions or referendums.