

Cabinet – Thursday 15 July 2021

Written question from Cllr Spink to the Leader, Isle of Wight Council

There is concern amongst Island residents that housing/planning policies have failed to deliver homes that Islanders, on or below the Island average wage, can afford to rent or buy, that our valued landscape/environment is not adequately protected and that breaches of planning/environmental policies, whether through lack of resources or otherwise, are not being adequately enforced.

There is also concern that the housing problems on the Island are being exacerbated by 'second homers' together with an increasing number of mainland residents choosing to retire to the Island (paragraph 2.18 Page 172 IPS: "Between 2020 and 2038 the population aged over 65 is forecast to increase by 45.2%, equivalent to an additional 18,550 people").

In order to address these concerns, I ask please the following questions:

1. The Draft Island Planning Strategy (IPS) recognises that the Government figure of 668 homes to be built on the Island per annum is undeliverable and seeks to reduce the figure to 486. Statistics show, however, that the Island has been unable to deliver more than an average of 365 homes per annum since 2012. By setting the figure at 486 are we not setting up the Island to fail and ought not the figure in the IPS be amended to 365?

Response A local plan period is a minimum of 15 years therefore evidence supporting the number within the Draft IPS has to be based on similar time periods to be robust and defensible at public examination. The evidence base providing the background to the number will be published alongside the Draft IPS and will be available to review and comment upon for the 9 week consultation period.

2. Many Islanders are of the view that newly built homes should be for Island Residents and persons moving to the Island for business purposes/to take up offers of employment.

Is there any reason that prevents newly built homes being only available to the above categories and, if not, ought not the IPS to be amended accordingly?

Response In Officers opinion, such a planning policy would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, to draft, defend at public examination, and then enforce across the island for all new built homes. As far as I am aware this (i.e. restrict all new homes built across an entire LPA administrative area to people living in particular postcodes or having a certain type of employment status) has never been achieved before outside of National Parks (and even then occupancy restrictions are often on targeted small areas within the Park) and historically policy guidance has always advised against such restrictions. The Draft IPS seeks to provide a suite of policies that are focused on providing more of the type, tenure and size of homes most needed by island residents in the right places. Affordable housing that is secured through planning agreements and delivered by registered providers has and will continue to be for island residents.

3. Re EV4 (Page 203 IPS): Much of the foul waste water of the West Wight drains to the Shalfleet Pumping Station and thence to the Sandown Waste-Water Treatment Works. On many occasions, particularly when there are high levels of rain, the Shalfleet Pumping Station discharges into the brook and thence to Newtown Creek and the Solent.

Ought not therefore EV4 to be amended requiring that all new developments that connect to the Shalfleet Pumping Station must demonstrate how they will not cause harm to the Solent European Sites and other protected areas?

Response EV4 has been drafted to align with the current position taken by both Natural England and the Environment Agency on 'nitrates', both of whom will be a statutory consultees on the Draft IPS.

4.The Environmental Audit Committee has reported that schemes requiring developers to contribute to net biodiversity gain are often inadequate because of the risk of poor monitoring and implementation. Much of Section 4 of the IPS relies on such schemes.

Has the efficacy of Section 4 been considered in light of the findings of the Environmental Audit Committee?

Response The forthcoming Environment Bill will place a legislative requirement on all development to demonstrate a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain. The Draft IPS has been drafted to align with this forthcoming legislation to ensure it can be implemented through the planning process.

5.The success of the IPS will, in large measure, depend upon the ability of the IoW Council to enforce planning policies, and conditions. In my opinion the enforcement section appears to be under-staffed/underfunded, the consequence of which is that action is only taken in a relatively small number of breaches. In addition, because there is no weekend emergency contact out of hours service it is open to developers to commit irreversible breaches e.g. destruction of woodland.

What measures are proposed to ensure that paragraph 6.11 (Page 253) of the IPS will be properly and efficiently put into practice?

This administration is very conscious of the need for sufficient capacity to robustly and effectively enforce the requirements of the Island Plan, this will be one of many priorities for the limited resources available to the council that we must consider. We will prioritise these resources in dialogue and consultation with town and parish councils and the wider community so that we are certain we are meeting the wishes of the whole community.

6.My understanding is that Covid 19 caused the previous administration to delay redrafting the IPS after after the period of public consultation.

Will consideration be given to requesting that the adverse effects of not having an up to date 5 year land supply/updated plan be suspended once the Public Consultation Period has commenced?

Response There is no provision within the current NPPF or Town & Country Planning legislation to request a suspension of the 'planning sanctions' applied to LPAs who cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply and/or fail the Housing Delivery Test. Decisions on planning applications are underpinned by the NPPF and the requirement for all development to be sustainable.