

Item 8 - Requested Items

Sustainable Communities OSC meeting on 18 October 2012

The following contains the detail of the item requested for consideration by the Committee from Councillor Nicols:-

At the May 12 meeting I raised a number of points that were relevant to proposed development under the LDF process in my ward. One concern was that the scale of growth would not be sufficient and that following an Inspectors review any required extra growth would be imposed into my Ward without the benefit of a full LDF review. My other key concern was that the development proposals to the North of Luton would not be viable or sustainable unless the Luton North strategic link road was in place. I could not understand how this element of highway infrastructure would be delivered of the back of the relatively limited housing in that area.

The answer that was given in Committee by the Portfolio Holder and critically by the officers present was that this Strategic link road would be delivered by the development community as part of their costs of building the houses to the North of Luton.

My concern was that this Strategic link road would not be forthcoming if delivered in this piece meal manner. An absolute assurance was given by the officers that a mechanism would be put in place for forward funding this road and that the detail would be presented to me in a private meeting to be subsequently arranged. The Portfolio Holder then made it clear that the road would not be a high speed highway of a strategic nature but would be of a lower order of road. This comment by the Portfolio Holder was reiterated at a subsequent meeting of the O&S Committee.

I attended meeting with Richard Fox and Cllr Young on the 4th of July at which point the Luton North Bypass was defined both in map for and verbally as being a series of estate roads that would create the effect of a bypass. My concerns then were that this would not fulfil the strategic nature of a bypass as I had always understood the plan to require. Cllr Young went to some pain to be explicit in stating that the speed on this road would not be 30mph but would credibly be lower, that is 20mph. This confirmed my view that the road being described was not in any way strategic in nature.

I raised these concerns at the O&S meeting on the 26th July, I made it clear that the minutes of the meeting of the 16th May were not correct in that the resolution for this key item of infrastructure had not been fully resolved. At this meeting of the 26th July Councillor Young as again explicit in stating that a Strategic Bypass would not be built but that it would be built to estate road standards, indeed he made a point of deriding the notion of a true strategic bypass as he stated that the bypass had been costed at "half a billion pounds". I clarified this by explaining that the legacy costing for a bypass were predicated on a continuation of the link from the A6 around the East of Luton to join with the A505. With the removal of Luton as statutory authority from the table this requirement for the bulk of the costing had now ceased. Nonetheless this jibe (half a billion ponds worth of infrastructure deficit) remained on the table.

I have since reviewed the evidence base for the LDF, particularly the Sustainability Appraisal. It is noteworthy that this key item of evidence was not available at the time that the May O&S Committee met, indeed I could only obtain sight of it by explicitly

requesting its production. It is dated as June 2012, sometime after the May meeting and too late for the June meeting of the O&S, its presence was not revealed at the July meeting though it has serious implications for the policy position on infrastructure in my ward.

I would ask that the O&S Committee question how such a key component of the evidence base be delivered after the May meeting which was tasked with examining the integrity of the LDF process.

I might comment that this SA does appear to have been something of a "Cut and Paste" effort. It carries a number of anomalous statements not the least of which are frequent referrals to needs of Luton Borough. It looks to me as though this is in fact a legacy document from the previous administration. If that be the case it, itself, should be reviewed by the O&S Committee to test its soundness.

My perception from reading the SA is that the housing delivery planned for the North of Luton may not go ahead without the provision of a strategic bypass. This is a policy statement contained within the SA. If this be the case then the statements publicly made at the May, June and July meetings of Sustainable Communities O&S are not compliant with the evidence base.

I would request that this item therefore be called into the O&S Committee for a detailed debate and explanation with that element of the growth being revoked from the LDF process unless a satisfactory outcome is agreed.

As a corollary to these formal statements at the various O&S Committees, I had a brief discussion with Councillor Young at the conclusion of a Council meeting in which he stated that the plan to deliver housing to the North of Luton has since been modified to include a Strategic Bypass. My judgement being that his officers have since read their own SA document and have realised that a Strategic Bypass is a statutory requirement. I might welcome this verbal statement but it has not been backed up with any written breakdown of how this bypass will be delivered, how it will be paid for, what its route will be and at what phase of the development it might be delivered. As this verbal statement is so radically different to the original formal statements made at the various O&S Committees and as Councillor Young has previously been scathing in his views as to how such an entity might be paid for I would want the O&S Committee to be formally appraised of this fundamental change of plan and that the debate that I sought to initiate in the May meeting be re invoked, that is how will such a strategic road be paid for and delivered. If no credible answer is forthcoming then again I would expect that the development to the North of Luton be removed from the LDF process until such time as a plan for its delivery is developed.

I understand that it is proposed that this item be incorporated into other deliberations on the LDF process. As I have had great difficulty in getting the committee to focus on this specific element of the overhaul growth agenda I do not believe that such a subsidiary debate will give this item a fair hearing and would therefore expect it to have its own agenda item allocation.

As the removal of this many houses from the LDF process is critical to the success of the LDF I would suggest that this item be placed at the head of the agenda.