

East Devon District Council

Meeting on 6 December 2023

Agenda Item No 9

Question Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of Council (Councillor Paul Arnott) from Councillor Jess Bailey

Question 1

1. On the 19th July 2023 I asked the Leader to provide details of officer meetings (including times dates and attendees) which had resulted in the proposed enlargement of West Hill's settlement boundary. This enlargement represents a radical change in West Hill's boundary and has the effect of potentially significantly opening up greenfield development around the perimeter of West Hill. I was advised that a response would be given 'in due course' but five months later an explanation has not been provided.

Please can you explain how it came about that the officers redrew West Hill's boundary (it cannot be due to the 'principles' approved by the strategic planning committee because those very same principles resulted in an entirely different boundary as part of the villages plan in 2017).

Please include details of internal email exchanges, meetings, and details of internal discussions.

2. On 9th October this council wrote to its three MPs calling on them to press the government to find a more positive approach to solving the housing crisis and to move away from algorithms that pay no regard to the consequences of new housing numbers on the environment and the communities affected by growth. Please publish the responses received.

Answer:

1. At Strategic Planning Committee on the 8th February 2022 Members considered a working draft of the New Local Plan and endorsed an approach to the drawing of settlement boundaries. The approach sought to draw them more 'loosely' to provide development opportunities for smaller sites to come forward around the settlements – see resolution under Strategic Policy 7 at [Agenda item - Working draft of the proposed East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2040 - East Devon](#). Following this a report was brought to Strategic Planning Committee on the 5th April 2022 seeking Members agreement to a methodology for defining settlement boundaries that would achieve this. The methodology was agreed by the committee.

The new methodology is markedly different from that used to define the boundaries in the villages plan. Three additional criteria were inserted into the methodology in order to address Members resolution of the 8th February 2022. These criteria state that the following land areas would now be included within settlement boundaries:

- Areas of land that are largely contained between site allocations proposed in the draft local plan and the main built up area of the related settlement.
- Parcels of land smaller than 0.15 of a hectare that may provide opportunities for no more than 4 homes to be built where generally compatible with the general layout and landscape setting of the settlement.
- Parcels of land larger than 0.15 of a hectare that may not have been considered suitable for allocation, but nevertheless may provide suitable development opportunities if applicants demonstrate through the development management process that individual proposals would be acceptable.

On the basis of the methodology including these new criteria the settlement boundaries were reviewed including that of West Hill and reported to Strategic Planning Committee on the 1st November 2022 where it was agreed to consult on the draft Local Plan including the settlement boundaries for West Hill and other settlements.

There will have been various meetings and discussions between officers in production of the methodology and its use in production of the settlement boundaries, however these are not expressly recorded other than key action points in team meetings. The key decisions relevant to this matter were however all made by Members of Strategic Planning Committee and are recorded in the minutes of the relevant meetings referred to above.

2. The only response to the letter received so far was from Simon Jupp MP and this has already been circulated to all Members by Maria Pearce via e-mail on 7th November at 8.52am.

Question Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of Council (Councillor Paul Arnott) from Councillor Ian Barlow

Question 2

Why is it if this council is supposed to be modern do we still have cabinet meetings that start at 6pm when like it or not people are not at their best mentally, officers have to wait around unproductively late into the evening and some decisions may appear rushed. Other committees where members don't receive extra money have their meetings in the day planning for instance.

Answer:

The 6pm start of certain committee meetings, Cabinet and Full Council is to allow elected members who have full time employment fulfil their duties for attending meetings without impacting their employment and allows members of the public to attend evening meetings.

If members wish to review the timings of meetings it would be sensible to undertake a consultation exercise with councillors and the public to find out if there is an appetite for making changes to the timings of meetings.