

Public questions to Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs

Council meeting: 28 September 2023

Question: 1.
From: Mr P
Response by: Councillor Franklin (Cabinet Spokesperson Regeneration and Culture)

Question:

I refer to the updated “*Sustainability and Climate Change*” and “*Design of Housing*” SPDs. I've read them and noted the comments, which were approved by Full Council on 27 July last. They seemed to me, in the context of the "climate emergency", to be non-prescriptive, ie “nice to have” rather than urgently needed. This view has since been reinforced by a comment made in support of the Housing SPD in the meeting, the Councillor stating that he would “welcome higher standards”.

Your *Housing strategy 2014-2033* states:

Building regulations are to change in order to ensure that all new housing is zero carbon from April 2016. [?] This will ensure that the design, construction and use of new housing will contribute towards meeting national carbon reduction targets and significantly reduce energy costs for householders.

I understand that new build proposers should be considering all or most of the following if BMBC is to make significant inroads on domestic emissions, in order to achieve its Zero40/45 targets:

- a. Electrical heating and hot water systems;
- b. Underfloor heating;
- c. Solar panels
- d. Back up batteries;
- e. Heavy-duty insulation and ventilation systems;
- f. Electric car charging points.

As far as I know, there are two largely-compliant housing schemes on the go - Goldthorpe and Billingley View, both financed by taxpayers – that incorporate at least some of these features, so there must be valuable information on design and build cost if not yet operation.

Whilst the sustainable development document makes reference to "grey water", there's nothing in the Housing SPD. Taking into account the recent worries about water shortages and flooding, surely this should also feature in housing specifications. Additionally, grey water measures could have a big impact on the need for and size of SuDS systems, which have their own maintenance and downstream cost issues.

Unless I'm misreading it, Your *Zero40/45* policies appear to require eventual conversion of all properties from gas to electrical heating to have any prospect of success. You are aware that this will involve considerable cost and disruption in existing properties, but incorporation into new builds would be relatively inexpensive, if unattractive. Thus, failure to ensure compliance now on new builds is, I suggest, potentially making purchasers liable for disproportionate future costs if mandated later.

Natural England is in the news, airing its views on the design of housing estates. One report (transcript attached) suggests:

“New housing is being blocked unless councillors agree to introduce green schemes such as Ulez and low-traffic neighbourhoods, in an approach that the environment watchdog is preparing to roll out across the country.”

Questions:

1. Since declaring the climate emergency in 2019, of planning applications approved, how many houses are included and how many still include gas heating?
 2. When will you start to refuse planning applications that don't specify most or all of the identified features, now that the new SPDs are in force?
 3. Will you be studying the outcomes of the two test sites and publishing the results?
 4. If so, do you have a timetable?
 5. Has the potential of grey water systems been discussed with Yorkshire Water?
 6. Have you any plans for including grey water systems in housing?
 7. If not, why not?
 8. Are your SPDs in line with Natural England's policies?
 9. If not, will they have a veto on any application requiring their input as consultees?
- Finally, in the same meeting, responding to the proposal for updating the "*Sustainability and Climate Change*" SPD, a Councillor noted the need to "*bring people along with us*" Amen to that. So:
11. It's now almost four years since you declared a "*climate emergency*". When will the Barnsley public be told what awaits them, not least in terms of cost and timing?
 12. National government is struggling to show it can achieve net zero by 2050, not least in terms of cost. Is it feasible for BMBC to try to achieve net zero by 2040/45, considering the reliance on achievements at the national level completely outside the control of BMBC, eg electrification of the grid?
 13. Has any calculation of the additional cost of bringing the deadline forward 5 years been made?
 14. If so, what is that cost?

Information for response:

1. Since declaring the climate emergency in 2019, of planning applications approved, how many houses are included and how many still include gas heating?

The local planning authority doesn't receive this information with planning applications. The Sustainable Construction SPD asks for Whole Life Carbon Assessments for major applications so for future major applications we may start to get this information through as part of that process.

For the purposes of compliance with the building regulations, the bulk of new housing is overseen by approved inspectors and not the council. Separately, we do not capture heating system types within our database, thereby, would not be able to readily interrogate to determine number of gas heating installations approved by the council.

2. When will you start to refuse planning applications that don't specify most or all of the identified features, now that the new SPDs are in force?

The SPDs, together with all relevant policies and other SPDs, are material considerations in dealing with planning applications from their adoption.

3. Will you be studying the outcomes of the two test sites and publishing the results
4. If so, do you have a timetable?

The development of 16 council houses at Billingley View, Bolton upon Dearne is the pilot scheme for the Barnsley Low Carbon Standard.

Post-construction testing and monitoring will be carried out by Leeds Beckett University for the first twelve months of occupation. The results will be included in a project closure report which will include an evaluation of the project and recommendations.

Billingley View is due to complete in October and monitoring will run until Autumn 2024. A report will be produced in early 2025.

The development at Market Street, Goldthorpe is not a 'test site'. No monitoring is proposed on this site.

5. Has the potential of grey water systems been discussed with Yorkshire Water?
6. Have you any plans for including grey water systems in housing?
7. If not, why not?

The Planning Policy team has not had specific discussions with Yorkshire Water on this matter. Yorkshire Water did have the opportunity to comment on the Sustainable Construction and Climate Change SPD.

8. Are your SPDs in line with Natural England's policies?

Natural England provided comments on the Sustainable Construction and Climate Change Adaptation SPD. No objections were raised, and comments primarily provided guidance relating to Green Infrastructure.

9. If not, will they have a veto on any application requiring their input as consultees?

Natural England will only comment on planning applications that have issues pertinent to their remit and responsibilities.

Finally, in the same meeting, responding to the proposal for updating the "*Sustainability and Climate Change*" SPD, a Councillor noted the need to "*bring people along with us*" Amen to that. So:

11. It's now almost four years since you declared a "*climate emergency*". When will the Barnsley public be told what awaits them, not least in terms of cost and timing?

Barnsley Council is focusing on what it can control and directly influence within the constraints of resources and budget.

The Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) refers to the two programmes of work (Zero40 and Zero45) that involves decarbonising council assets and influencing and supporting local businesses, and voluntary and third-sector community to reach net-zero emissions before 2045.

Central Government needs to strengthen climate legislation and ensure that appropriate finance and support are made available to local councils to enable them to deliver on their objectives.

If you'd like to get involved in work or have ideas for a community project regarding sustainability, then please contact your local area council manager.

12. National government is struggling to show it can achieve net zero by 2050, not least in terms of cost. Is it feasible for BMBC to try to achieve net zero by 2040/45, considering the reliance on achievements at the national level completely outside the control of BMBC, eg electrification of the grid?

Barnsley Council is doing as much as it possibly can and as explained above, officers are focusing on what they can control and directly influence using the budget and resources that are available.

13. Has any calculation of the additional cost of bringing the deadline forward 5 years been made?

No – The Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) makes it very clear that the council will only commit to deadlines that it feels are achievable.

14. If so, what is that cost?

Answered above.

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Council meeting: 28 September 2023

Question: 2.
From: Mr R
Response by: Councillor Cain (Cabinet Spokesperson Public Health and Communities) and Councillor Higginbottom (Cabinet Spokesperson Environment and Highways)

Question:

How many air pollution recording stations are there within the borough, what is their location, what dates were they put in position, and for each over the past 10 years, what have they recorded?

It is a fact that petrol and diesel motor vehicles cause air pollution, and the council is planning to make major changes to the A61 Wakefield Road coming out of Barnsley, these works will include a third traffic lane.

Over a long period, this work will be very disruptive, and other than a benefit to road traffic vehicles, what justification is there for it?

Will it bring clear benefits for the environment, and health and welfare of the residents of the Barnsley Borough?

Information for response:

We have three air quality monitoring stations located in the borough at Gawber (started 7.7.97), Kendary (started 10.11.09) and Pogmoor (started 26.8.21). These sites provide real time data and details of the pollutants the sites monitor along with data and information relating to these sites can be found at the air quality england website:

https://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/local-authority/?la_id=19

Information relating to three other monitoring sites which are no longer active is also available via this link.

We have 66 Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) tubes which are located throughout the borough. Locations of these tubes are reviewed on an annual basis and data relating to the NOx tubes can be made available on request.

The scheme you mention is not a council scheme. It's being delivered by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and is a Bus Corridor Improvement Scheme aimed at improving punctuality and bus journey times. The benefit is targeted towards bus passengers, not car-borne traffic. This is part of a number of recent planning applications made by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority aiming to improve bus services by addressing areas of congestion on the highway network.

Please see the below links for information and reports on the recent planning approvals that I think may interest you:

<https://www.applications.barnsley.gov.uk/PlanningExplorerMVC/Home/ApplicationDetails?planningApplicationNumber=2021%2F1660#documents>

<https://www.applications.barnsley.gov.uk/PlanningExplorerMVC/Home/ApplicationDetails?planningApplicationNumber=2021%2F1690>

You may also find the Local Government Association produced document 'A country in a jam: tackling congestion in our towns and cities', linked below, which highlights that:

“Congestion also has a significant environmental impact. It increases the amount of time cars are producing harmful emissions and the stop-start nature of congested roads is the most inefficient way of running an engine. In a traffic jam vehicle emissions are four times the level they are in free flowing traffic.”

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.16%20Congestion_report_v03.pdf

Council officers are in support of the proposed works by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority as they will help in providing a more free-flowing network that will improve bus services by reducing journey time reliability concerns.

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Council meeting: 28 September 2023

Question: 3.
From: Mr R
Response by: Councillor Franklin (Cabinet Spokesperson Regeneration and Culture)

Question:

It was recently reported there are 9179 people on the council housing waiting list. What statistics do you have to show what and who these people are, and where they are living at this point in time?

Has the council a clear intent to build more council homes which would be managed by Berneslai Homes?

Information for response:

Berneslai Homes manages the Housing Register on behalf of the council, in line with the council's Lettings Policy. Berneslai Homes is in the middle of reviewing applications to prepare for the new Barnsley Homeseeker Scheme (Lettings Policy 2023) which we anticipate will become effective from 1 December 2023.

The key objectives of this new policy are:

- To respond to housing needs in the borough by making the best use of council housing and other available social housing.
- To give reasonable preference to meet the housing needs of those households in greatest need and prevent hardship to themselves or others.

What is the shape of the Housing Register?

The information below shows the size and band profile of the register before the review started (as of 6/9/23) and estimations once Berneslai Homes has completed the full review.

Band	2022 (end March)	2023 (before review)	Estimated Dec 23
1	346	336	175
2	994	1214	640
3	855	1019	1000
4	6753	7355	2400
5	576	615	0
TOTAL	9,524	10,539	3,315

In terms of waiting list numbers prior to the review, 21% of people were existing Barnsley Council (transfer) tenants, 79% were new applicants, a mixture of people living in the private rented sector, homeowners, people who are homeless and people living with family and friends.

In terms of the minimum number of bedrooms required for applicants in priority groups (Band 1,2,3):

	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
1 Bedroom	43%	39%	38%
2 Bedroom	33%	31%	35%
3 Bedroom	15%	20%	18%
4 or more Bedroom	8%	10%	9%

- The waiting list numbers had increased in 2023 before the review as the regular quarterly re-registration process had been paused. This process normally results in high numbers of cancelled applications for the lowest priority bands. This is not indicative of a significant increase in demand between 2022 and 2023.
- The estimated figures for Bands 1, 2 and 3 are based on the decisions made to date during the ongoing registration process. For Band 4, this is based on 31% of the existing applicants remaining on the register (current return rates) plus new applications entering the band during the rest of the year.
- In May 2023, we reviewed 695 owner-occupiers with no assessed housing need in Band 4. We advised them that under the new policy, they would no longer qualify. Only 92 asked to stay on the register, these will be cancelled in December.
- In March 2023, we reviewed 615 out-of-district applicants with no local connection to the borough. Most people did not return their reviews. All remaining applicants will be cancelled in December 2023.

- We have around 1000 new applications which are awaiting registration. We are contacting people with low priority (approximately 700 people) to ask them if they want to continue with their application considering supply and demand and the new policy provisions.

We estimate that 500 people will continue to stay on the register. If people have some indication of housing needs, they are likely to go into Band 3. This is approximately 300 people.

- High-priority, new applications are prioritised for processing within 20 days from receiving all required evidence.

The council is currently building 52 new homes across four sites in the borough. These are all due to be completed during 2023/2024 and early 2024/2025. There is a clear intent to build more homes to be managed by Berneslai Homes in the future. The extent of the building programme is dependent on the availability of funding available within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and from external grant sources such as Homes England. There are significant pressures on stock holding councils, and their HRAs, given the significant investments required to make sure that our existing homes remain decent, safe and comply with all regulatory requirements.