

Public Questions and Answers Sheet**Question from Kirdford Parish Council:**

Members will be aware of the water neutrality issue affecting the northern sector of the Chichester district, which also covers all of Horsham district Council and most of Crawley Borough Council. We know that Cllr Taylor has indicated the NE advice is being fully implemented by CDC. As a small village in the affected area we have taken a keen interest in how this is being implemented, but have identified several areas of concern which we have brought to the attention of Mr Frost, Director of Planning and separately to Mr Whitty, Divisional Manager, both subsequently copied to Cllr Taylor, regarding the accuracy by which several HRAs were carried out on existing planning applications or their applicability to un-started developments. We hope you will agree that CDC should be fully committed in implementing Natural England's advice on water neutrality and that this should not be left to interpretation.

Could this council:

1. Confirm it is aware of planning permissions having been granted despite significant errors in HRA water usage calculations and what actions are in place to correct these and prevent their repetition?
2. Explain why planning officers are making their own judgements on whether to conduct HRAs in the Water Neutrality Zone, rather than meeting NE's requirements to demonstrate water neutrality
3. Reaffirm CDC is following all of Natural England's recommendations in full
4. Update CDCs local plan policy to reflect NEs advice of 85 Litres per person per day, as a requirement for any development in the Water Neutrality zone

Answer from Cllr Taylor:

Thank you for your question. Chichester District Council is the Competent Body for assessing the impact of planning application proposals on the protected features of a habitats site. This assessment is undertaken in light of advice provided by the Council's own ecological experts, and that of Natural England, with which CDC officers have a close working relationship. The outcome of any appropriate assessment undertaken by the Council is the subject of a consultation with Natural England, which has the opportunity to comment on the assessment of impact and mitigation proposals. However, in undertaking such assessments, the Council has regard first to the standing advice issues by Natural England, in the form of its Position Statement and FAQs.

The (HRA) appropriate assessment process is only required where there is the potential for an adverse impact on a designated site through a development proposal, in this case where there is likely to be a material further water demand that could lead to the need for an increase level of abstraction from a natural watercourse that affects the Arun Valley designated Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar sites. Therefore the process requires those planning applications that would not lead to a material impact (before mitigation) on the protected sites to be 'screened out'. This is in accordance with advice from Natural England.

Although the process of appropriate assessment on this issue has been refined as the matter of water neutrality emerged as an issue in the application determination process, and officers have been provided with further training on the matter, the Council is not aware of

any planning permission issued erroneously as a result of miscalculation in the appropriate assessment process.

The issue of reducing water consumption of new development will be an important consideration in the Council's Local Plan Review process. Any new policy on this issue will be formulated and consulted upon, in due course. This, however, does not override the immediate requirement that any current planning application is water neutral before permission can be issued.

Question from Mr George Hibberd:

In my last appearance at full council, you said that the success of a Citizens' Assembly on climate, as previously promised in your climate action plan, is defined in terms of having the conversation rather than new actions or changes in behaviour of individuals. The purpose of a Citizens' Assembly is to give a voice to a truly representative cross-section of a community to inform decision makers and legislators. It creates that vital link between the council and our community. The idea is that the recommendations that come out of the CA are used as a mandate for councils to take genuine action on the climate crisis. It is the voice of the people.

It is unfair to judge the current success of Citizens' Assemblies on the actions taken by government and councils after such assemblies, because it is up to decision makers whether or not they listen and implement the recommendations of a CA, not the participants of the CA. You must commission the CA on the understanding that the recommendations would be implemented. CAs so far in the UK have been purely consultative rather than decision-making for legislators. It is therefore unfair to see CAs as the problem, rather than those governing bodies that commission them.

You also said that finding the cross-section of society requires an investment of time. The process is carried out by an external organisation through a process called sortition. The organising of CAs is also done by external organisations such as 'Involve' and 'Sortition Foundation' - not by councils. The purpose of CAs is that they are outside of the political sphere and not influenced by lobbying and party politics, therefore there should be very little time commitment from the Council. Even if this was an investment of time and money, CAs are infinitely more fair and democratic than any process in this council.

You said that the outcomes of the CA are about "capturing the conversation" and "risk remaining abstract". The outcomes of Climate Assembly UK, for example, were concrete, far from abstract and easily implementable (i.e. a frequent flyer levy for aviation). Involve, who runs Citizens' Assemblies, has an entire guide on how local authorities can implement CAs. I will forward this onto you to have a look at.

You said that other LAs found that assemblies "have not been found to increase direct engagement or mobilisation of residents". This is not the purpose of a CA as highlighted earlier. They are not a method of communication. CAs are more representative than this council is representative of the Chichester District in terms of age, race, religion, sexual identity, gender identity educational level and social background. Climate Assembly UK is a shining example of this.

It is clear that understanding of the purpose, mechanics, organisation and principles of CAs, despite our multiple appearances in these meetings and continued dialogue with councillors, is still very misunderstood. It is also frustrating that we have been denied the option of follow up questions at previous meetings to address misunderstanding and falsehoods, and have to wait until the next full council to address these face to face. It should be your responsibility

to try to communicate with us, rather than the other way around - you are our elected representatives.

As such, will you commit to a face-to-face meeting to iron out these misunderstandings and start a dialogue with the organisations that run CAs? I truly believe that with full understanding, you will fully support a CA to address the climate crisis and see their potential to address the many other issues of our time.

Answer from Cllr Plant:

Thank you for your question. As you are aware, the Council has previously made a decision not to hold a Citizens' Assembly but to use other existing council communications channels to engage with the public on climate change. The reasons for this were outlined in my response to your question to the November meeting of Council. Whilst I can make no commitment to meeting your broader request that the Council should hold a citizen's assembly, I am nevertheless open to having a face to face discussion with you about this to enable a shared understanding of our respective concerns and points of view.