

Motion 2 to Council: Affordable and Social Housing Programme

Proposer: JOSH BURR

Secunder: BARRY O LEARY

This council's commitment to social and affordable housing was a corporate priority approved by all members on 24 February 2020 and was the first effort to deliver such housing locally in almost two decades.

There are more than 1,600 families on the council's register and the list is growing rapidly as more people lose their jobs as a consequence of the covid pandemic.

Data from housing charity Shelter shows that 21% of families in England are fearful of losing their home because of Covid-19 and 14% of families have already cut back on buying food in a bid to meet rent or mortgage payments.

Data from Citizens Advice also shows one in seven renters have seen their household income drop by more than 40% since the pandemic began and that at least 40% of renters were worried about their ability to pay their rent.

On 2nd November, Mendip Council's Cabinet agreed to take forward plans to build affordable and social housing on four sites owned by Mendip District Council.

On 16th November, Mendip's Scrutiny Board considered concerns raised by members of the public and councillors about one of the sites, Easthill in Frome, and a vote was taken to refer the decision back to Cabinet for further discussion.

On 26th November, a specially convened Cabinet meeting agreed that three sites would be progressed, with a pause on Easthill to allow more time for objections to be considered and addressed by the Cabinet member responsible.

The motion now submitted to this full council meeting by the Conservative opposition group distances their previous administration of Mendip from a shocking history of inaction in helping to house people in Mendip who are most in need.

It was this Conservative administration who applied in 2017 for Land Release Fund monies from the government to prepare council-owned sites including Easthill for development for private housing.

Indeed, the Leader of the Conservative group asked at a recent meeting whether more money could be made from these pieces of land if they were developed for market-rate housing, ignoring the desperate need of so many in our communities.

We are disappointed that the Conservative motion to tonight's full council meeting is seeking to destroy our social housing programme by overturning the Council's constitution.

Advice prepared by the council's own lawyers indicates this motion would overturn Section 8.5.9 of Mendip District Council's constitution which states that decisions reconsidered by Cabinet come into immediate effect.

It also contravenes Section 5.1.2 which states that the overall management of the Council's financial, property and other resources lie with Cabinet.

It further contravenes Section 9D (2) of the Local Government Act 2000 which states that this decision was Cabinet's decision to make.

If the Conservatives motion was passed, members voting for it would be in breach of section 1.5 of the Member Code of Conduct which requires members to act in accordance with the constitution.

Resolution:

Full Council resolves that social and affordable housing should remain a key priority for Mendip District Council and is disappointed by this flagrant attempt to derail a meaningful attempt to build much-needed homes.

Full Council notes the Cabinet decisions of 2nd and 26th November and recognises that the site at Easthill in Frome is currently paused, pending further assessment and consideration of valid and deeply-held public concerns.

Full Council resolves to form a politically proportionate oversight group of no more than ten members, who will work with officers and relevant cabinet members to ensure public views are heard and fed into the process of developing social and affordable housing.