

Question submitted by Sarah Bister to the Deputy Leader Councillor Duncan McGregor.

“I’d like to refer Members to my question and answer given at the meeting of Council in September 2020 which I have included for your reference. Please can the Deputy Leader detail the planning training that Members have to undergo prior to considering applications such as this, are refreshers provided to reflect changes in laws and any Local Plan changes, and any reasons why Planning Committee members may not always take qualified officers advice?”

COUNCIL MINUTE CL22-20/21A – September 2020

a) Question from Sarah Bister to the Leader of the Council:

“Will the council do as the MP Mark Fletcher has suggested and send the planning decision 19/00583/OUT to an independent peer review hence demonstrating your commitment to put residents first?”

The Leader of the Council thanked Sarah Bister for her question. He explained that the Council has to build 272 houses a year, maintain a five year plan of housing supply, and plan for the future in an ever-changing world. This is all done with the aims of giving all residents somewhere to live, cater for a growing population, and ensure the houses are built to an acceptable standard.

The Leader of the Council added that he had asked the Monitoring Officer for guidance on the appropriateness of the Planning Application. The Monitoring Officer had informed him that the decision was taken by the Planning Committee in a fully transparent and accountable manner. The reasons for the decision were set out in the decision notice and were made on proper Planning grounds, and the local highway authority were satisfied that the application would give adequate access to the site via Park Avenue. For these reasons, the Monitoring Officer advised that the findings of a peer review would find that the Council took the decision correctly.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that some residents were not happy with the decision, but this did not mean it was incorrect in Planning terms. He added that Planning decisions are taken with material Planning considerations in mind, which can cause conflict with local communities, but decisions must be taken based on Government guidance and Planning law. He added that an independent peer review would not be able to change the granting of Planning permission.

The Leader of the Council concluded by stating that he did not agree with the comments made by Mark Fletcher MP.

The Chair invited Sarah Bister to ask one supplementary question. Sarah Bister asked that if the decision was as transparent and correct as described, why not peer review it?

The Leader of the Council responded by saying he was confident the proper process had been adhered to and had full trust in the guidance given by Planning officers and the Monitoring Officer. He referred to the previously mentioned housing numbers the Council had to meet, and in particular the obligations on housing created by the developing Local Plan.