

**PUBLIC QUESTION RECEIVED for Place Scrutiny Committee – 8 March 2018
from Mr Peter Cleasby**

To Councillor Edwards as Leader and Portfolio Holder City Development

Question

The Draft Statement of Community Involvement for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan envisages that 6 weeks will be allowed for public consultation on the first draft of the Plan. The 6-week limit was defended by the project manager for the Plan, Simon Thornley, at a public meeting on 19 January 2018. The Chief Executive of East Devon District Council subsequently indicated that a 12-week period would be preferable.

Unlike developers and the large house builders who can afford to pay expert consultants to study the draft and the volumes of supporting evidence, many individuals and small organisations cannot make serious responses to the draft within 6 weeks. Some will need to consult their members. Planning is intended to shape the communities in which we all live, so their input is every bit as important as those with professional skills and commercial interests.

Since the final version of the Statement of Community Involvement has not yet been published, despite the closing date for comments being 11 months ago, will the City Council make it clear to the partner authorities that it considers a 12-week consultation period must be adopted?

Response - Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder City Development thanked Mr Cleasby for his question. Of course, this was a matter for agreement between the four Councils preparing the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan, and not one for just one Council acting alone. Any decision on this would need to make sure that it struck a proper balance between the need to consult and engage communities, and the increasing imperative that there was a good, long term Plan in place. For Exeter, the need for a Plan was particularly important as we do not have a five year supply of housing and were therefore particularly vulnerable to ad-hoc development by appeal, with the loss of strategic oversight and local decision making this implied. Having said that, he agreed that 6 weeks was quite a short period, and he would certainly support some increase as long as it did not have a significant impact on the timetable. He said that he did not think it would be sensible to give a more definitive answer at this stage, since the matter would come before the Cabinets of the four Councils for decision in the near future.

Mr Cleasby was invited to respond and he said that he was grateful for the response from the Leader. He understood that meetings would have to be held at the other Councils. Nevertheless he still considered that a longer period of consultation would be more appropriate, as it was important to ensure a robust Plan and the local population would be all the better for being informed.